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Research Design Proposal

30% of your final grade is based on a research design proposal. The proposal should be a maximum of 15 pages in length (typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font, Chicago style citations). Students will be allowed to choose the topic of their paper, provided it is related to political science. The instructor will be available during office hours for consultation. The paper should be written with minimal grammatical errors, feature a review of the relevant scholarly literature, a well developed theory, and a detailed discussion of a potential test of that theory. A more detailed discussion of the paper will be posted on the course website. The paper is due Tuesday, **April 16**. *E-mailed papers will not be accepted.* Papers will be docked a full letter grade for each day they are late.

Students will be allowed fairly wide latitude in choosing their topic. Again, do not hesitate to consult the instructor for ideas and/or suggestions. The topic should be in some way related to the United States Congress. The most important aspect of choosing a paper question is that the topic be *testable* using data or methods that can be acquired and implemented.

The final paper should require the following labeled sections:

I. Introduction – This section sets up the paper. What is the question you are seeking to answer? Why does it matter? What is your argument? Provide a brief outline of what you're planning on doing in the paper. A clear introduction goes a long way towards motivating the research.

Students often have difficulties selecting a paper topic. Feel free to contact the instructor for feedback on this. Here is a listing of some broader ideas for paper topics that students have looked at in the past:

- How does <gender, income, education, the Electoral College> affect <voting, turnout, etc.> in <presidential elections, congressional elections, state judicial elections, political primaries, etc.> in the United States?
- How does <term limits for elected officials, the line-item veto, campaign finance reform, the length of a member's term, negative campaign advertising, the Senate filibuster> affect <a representatives' voting, spending in congress/a state, the likelihood a member gets reelected>?
- How does <age, gender, the mode of selection; impact voting in ;the United States Court of Appeals, trial courts, the United States Supreme Court, the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate>?

- What factors influence <members of Congress, State representatives, governors> decision to <retire, seek higher office>?

II. Literature Review – The literature review section builds off of your introduction. What does the most recent and relevant literature say about your question? Is the current literature limited in any way? Are there controversies or debates within it? In what way will your paper contribute to this literature?

Your paper should cite at least five political science/scholarly resources. This includes published articles, working papers or published books. An invaluable resource to identify these papers can be found at JStor or through usage of Google Scholar. Students looking for accessible political science research may also consider consulting articles discussed on The Monkey Cage – a political science blog. The blog itself is not a source; however, the articles they discuss are often good fit for your literature review.

Articles published in law reviews are fair game to use in the paper, but that they do not count towards your five scholarly sources. Please don't take this as an indictment of law reviews - they publish some fantastic research. However, they don't go through the blind peer-review process and are often more normative than traditional social science research. Additionally, students will become familiar with law reviews as they go on to law school, etc., and as such, I'd like to them to use political science research while they're here.

Wikipedia is open-source material and **NOT** appropriate for this paper. Please do not cite to Wikipedia in any form in this paper.

III. Theory – Again, this section should build off of your previous two sections. It is typically the most difficult section for students to compose. Your theory needs to be clear in addressing the issues and questions posed in your introduction and literature review sections.

It should take your thesis statement from your introduction and build on it. For example, in the Moraski and Shipan (1999) paper we will be reading in class, their thesis was that “political context is going to dictate the ideological location of Supreme Court nominations.” Their theory explained why this is in greater detail. It argued that when the Senate was located to the left of the president, who was to the left of the current court, than the Senate should allow the president substantially leeway in choosing a nominee. Moraski and Shipan explained why they felt this was the case in greater detail and then expanded on two other ideological scenarios.

Often times, students write weak theory sections because they don't want to state anything they think is going to be obvious. Don't make this mistake and don't assume too much of the reader. Another common mistake is that students fail to anticipate and evaluate any counter-points to their argument. This another issue that should be dealt with in your theory. Generally – a good theory section is a page and half. If you're not running that long, don't kill yourself over it – you can still put together a solid paper even if the theory is weak.

IV. Methods – Once you have made your theory clear, you should begin thinking about

how you will test it. What are your hypotheses/expectations? What variables will you use? How will you acquire them? What do you expect to find when you test them? What will you use to test your expectations? You can keep the technical aspects of this section as simple as you would like.

You do not need to specify or include a working statistical model – and one is not expected for this paper. Your methods section should focus on (1) identifying where you would get the data from the test your hypothesis, and then, for you to (2) identify your dependent and (3) any independent variables in your analysis. You can feel free to write your conclusion section as if you ran the model and that your results confirmed your hypotheses.

V. Conclusion – Assuming your results hold, what conclusions can you draw from your research? Can your findings be generalized to other areas? Can you make any normative recommendations based on them? What future work is necessary?