POLS 7010: Research Design

Fall 2023
Th: 3:55-6:50pm, Baldwin 104

Prof. David Cottrell
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Goal:
The goal of this course is to broaden your understanding of how research in political science is conducted and to give you a foundation for designing your own research as you move forward in your career as a political scientist. The course intends to improve your intuition about what political science research is about and how to conduct it. You will learn about the importance of making valid causal inferences, about the challenges to doing so, and about the research strategies political scientists use to overcome those challenges. Ultimately, the course intends to give you some exposure to a variety of research designs that can help you to improve your research and its validity.

Course Requirements

Short Papers: You will submit 5 short papers due at various dates during the semester as noted in the course agenda below. Each short paper is worth 15% of your final class grade. Ten points are granted on completion of the first draft, due on eLC by 9am on the morning of class, as noted in the schedule below. Late assignments will be docked 1 point immediately, and an additional half point per day late. If your assignment is late, I cannot guarantee timely feedback. Additionally, five points will be assessed following revisions based on instructor feedback. Revised short papers are due via on eLC by Wednesday, December 13th at 5pm. The prompts for short paper assignments are listed below.

1. Research question: Formulate a “big” question about your political science subfield. Then, revise that big question into a research question, that is answerable in the space of a paper manuscript. Derive a testable hypothesis and describe the ideal data for answering your question. This memo should be no longer than 3 double-spaced pages.

2. Experimental design: Take a well-known theory of politics and derive a hypothesis that is testable using an experimental design. Describe the theory, hypothesis, and experimental design in no more than 5 double-spaced pages.

3. Quasi-experimental design: Take a well-known theory of politics and derive a hypothesis that is testable using a quasi-experimental design. Describe the theory, hypothesis, and design in no more than 5 double-spaced pages.
4. **Case study or Observational design:** Take a well-known theory of politics and derive a hypothesis that is testable using a case study or observational design. Describe the theory, case selection strategy, hypothesis, and design in no more than 5 double-spaced pages.

5. **Survey or Interview design:** Take a well-known theory of politics and derive a hypothesis that is testable using a survey or other form of interview. Describe the theory, hypothesis, and design in no more than 5 double-spaced pages.

**Participation:** Active participation is foundational to graduate courses. You are expected to do come to class having completed all assigned reading and ready to ask questions and actively discuss course material. To do so, you should take notes when reading and reflect on the material prior to class.

**Attendance:** Your attendance is not graded in this class. However, participation accounts for a substantial portion of your final grade, and it is not possible to participate actively without attending. In other words, attendance is “necessary” but not “sufficient” for success in this class.

If you are ill, please do not come to class! In such an instance, make sure to review the lecture slides, follow up with a classmate for their notes, and come to office hours or schedule a meeting with me to clarify any points of confusion.

**Readings:** Most readings are available to you for free via google scholar, accessed from campus. Selections from books are available through the university library, at [http://gilfind.uga.edu/](http://gilfind.uga.edu/). Readings that are not available through these sources will be made available on the course’s eLC page. We will engage extensively with the following textbook, available free to you online, over the course of the semester:


**Slides:** All slides will be made available on the course eLC page.

**Grades:**

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- Short Papers: 75%
- Participation: 25%

**Grade scale:**
- 90-92.9%: A-
- 87-89.9%: B+
- 83-86.9%: B
- 80-82.9%: B-
77-79.9%: C+
73-76.9%: C
70-72.9%: C-
60-69.9%: D
<60%: F

Academic Honesty Policy:
The academic honesty policy of the university is supplemented (not replaced) by an Honor Code which was adopted by the Student Government Association and approved by the University Council May 1, 1997, and provides: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." All students agree to abide by this code by signing the UGA Admissions Application.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources:
- If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.
- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) or crisis support (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

Care In Using Third-Party Grading Software
Care should be exercised using electronic platforms for grading student assignments, exams, etc. Student information is FERPA-protected. If you are planning to use third-party software/web-based platforms for grading, please consult with EITS Computer Equipment, Software and Services at 706-542-6033 (2-6033 if using a campus landline) to ensure FERPA-protected protocols are followed.

ChatGpt
ChatGPT is a large language model chatbot that uses machine learning algorithms to generate content in response to user prompts. For some instructors, ChatGPT poses challenges for classroom assignments and tests. Under the right conditions, it can also be harnessed as a learning tool. Please see these tips (https://ctl.uga.edu/resources/documents/ChatGPT-Guidance-for-Instructorsc.pdf) from the UGA CTL for navigating ChatGPT and other chatbots.
Week 1. Overview of the class
August 17

Week 2. The Scientific Study of Politics: research questions, theory, hypotheses, validity
August 24

Required reading:

Week 3. NO CLASS (APSA)
August 31

Week 4. Descriptive inference and measurement
September 7

Required reading:
4. On measuring ideology:
Week 5. Pitfalls of measurement: reliability and validity
Research question memo due via eLC drop box by 9am
September 14

Reading:


Week 6. Causal inference and counterfactuals
September 21

Reading:


Week 7. Experiments and field experiments
September 28

Reading:


Week 8. Natural Experiments
October 5.
Reading:

Week 9. Other quasi-experimental designs
Experimental design memo due via eLC drop box by 9am
October 12.
Reading:


**Week 10. Observational designs**  
October 19

**Reading:**

**Week 11. Case studies, case selection, and the comparative method**  
*Quasi-experimental design memo due via eLC drop box by 9am*  
October 26

**Reading:**

**Week 12. On mechanisms and process tracing**  
November 2

   a. Also read Chapter 1. Introduction

**Week 13. Surveys**
*Case study or observational design memo due via eLC drop box by 9am*
**November 9**

**Reading:**

**Week 14. Fieldwork: talking to people**
**November 16**

**Reading:**

**November 23. Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 15. Best Practices**
Survey or interview design memo due via eLC drop box by 9am
November 30

Reading:

All revised short papers are due via eLC by Wednesday, December 13th at 5pm.