INTL 6010: Research Methods in International Policy
University of Georgia, Department of International Affairs

Course Instructor Information
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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs, 8:15-9:15am & by appt.

Course Meeting Information
Spring 2024
Thursdays, 11:10am-2:00pm
115 Candler Hall (IA Building)
https://www.elc.uga.edu

Course Description
Policy analysts consume and produce knowledge. Excelling at such tasks requires the analyst to know some fundamental principles of "good" policy research. On the consumer side, how do we evaluate claims about the efficacy of policies, as well as the evidence used to support those claims? On the production side, how do we generate a tractable question to investigate, and how do we design a study to answer that question competently? With respect to the latter, for example, how do we make an argument and generate a hypothesis from it? How do we gather the appropriate data—whether quantitative or qualitative or both—to evaluate the hypothesis? How do we entertain the possibility that our hypothesis is incorrect? How do we present our results convincingly—in writing or visually—and how do we adjust that presentation for the audience receiving our results? More broadly, how do we approach existing research, as well as our own, skeptically?

This course addresses the above questions. Its structure highlights the various steps in the non-linear research process. Along the way, it also considers best practices in, pitfalls that researchers encounter during, and common errors researchers make within the research process. Students apply these various insights to a long-term (collaborative) policy-relevant research project—a project that prepares them not only for their upper-level seminars, but for their individual capstone project as well.

Course Objectives
At the conclusion of this course, students should be (better) able to:

- Generate policy-relevant research questions to study
- Consume existing policy research, scholarly research, and news stories skeptically (e.g., identifying unsubstantiated theoretical or empirical claims, or noting shortcomings)
- Synthesize existing research—and marshal it in support of an argument
- Make a theoretical argument, which includes conceptualizing key terms, elaborating assumptions, outlining the argument's logic, and deriving hypotheses
- Determine the data needed to evaluate an argument, being mindful of any limitations of either the selected approach or the data itself
- Generate and explain descriptive statistics
- Present an argument (and/or evidence) concisely, adjusting the presentation for the audience at hand
- (Collaborate with peers to) complete a long-term, policy-based project
- Write more concisely—and edit their own and others' work
- Understand how to complete their capstone project

Course Reading Material
The required textbook for this course is:

- Rassel, Gary, Suzanne Leland, Zachary Mohr, and Elizabeth O'Sullivan. (2021) *Research Methods for Public Administrators*, 7th edn. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Students can access an electronic version of this textbook through the UGA Library's website. Those students who wish to purchase a printed copy of the textbook can do so either through the UGA bookstore or their preferred online retailer.

The instructor makes all other required readings—that is, anything *not* within the required textbook—available electronically through the course's eLearning Commons (eLC) website (log-in using UGA Single Sign On at: https://uga.view.usg.edu/).

Course Requirements
The requirements for this course, and the percentage that each contributes to the final grade, are:

1. *Professionalization* (20%). A career in policy requires thoughtful, productive participation, and we will therefore practice this skill during the course. Every student should (i) complete the required readings for a class session before that session begins, (ii) prepare some thoughts on these readings, (iii) attend each class session, (iv) contribute meaningfully to each class session's discussion and activities, and (v) engage enthusiastically throughout the entirety of our class sessions. *Unexcused absences affect your final course grade.*

2. *Exams* (15% each; 30% total). Students complete two exams on the course's required reading. These exams occur in class on February 22 and April 18.

3. *Policy Paper Analysis* (5% each; 10% total). Each student selects two days on which to submit a policy paper analysis—on a topic and paper of their choosing. By noon on the day before the selected date, the student will distribute and submit (i) the policy paper and (ii) their analysis. For more details, see the Policy Paper Analysis Assignment (on eLC).

4. *Research Project* (20% process, as divided below; 20% final written product; 40% total). Policy work often involves collaboration. To work on this skill—and to better prepare students to undertake their individual capstone project later in the degree program—students complete a collaborative research design project over the academic term. This project contains the following components and deadlines:
    - The instructor assigns students to a collaborative research group in class on **January 11**.
    - *Research Question* (2%): A single sentence that identifies a dependent and independent variable, formulated as a question for study. This is due **January 18**. (Note well: The precise question wording will/can change throughout the term.)
    - *Literature Review* (5%): A 3 to 5-page, focused synthesis of existing knowledge on the question that the team plans to study. This is due **February 1**.
    - *Theoretical Argument* (5%): A 3 to 5-page argument that (i) lists any starting assumptions and scope conditions, (ii) provides a step-by-step logical connection between the independent and dependent variables, (iii) diagrams the theoretical argument, and (iv) generates at least one hypothesis to evaluate empirically. This is due **February 29**.
    - *Research Design* (5%): A 2 to 4-page strategy for evaluating the hypothesis with evidence, which includes specification of the (i) temporal and spatial scope, (ii) unit of analysis, (iii) potential data, (iv) measurement of all variables, and (v) method. This is due **April 4**.
    - *Peer Feedback* (3%): Teams circulate a full working draft of their project by **April 4**. Each individual student then provides detailed feedback on *one* paper. All feedback is due by **April 11**.
    - *Project Presentation*: The team presents (i.e., gives a briefing on) its final project in class on **April 25**.

- *Final Project* (20%): The final written version of the team project is due by **April 29 at 11:59pm**. The submitted document contains (i) a response to the feedback received, (ii) a *revised* introduction, (iii) a *revised* literature review, (iv) a *revised* theoretical argument, and (v) a *revised* research design. It may also—but need not—contain preliminary results (depending on the team's progress).
- *Meetings with Instructor*: Each team meets with the instructor *at least* three times during the semester—once **before February 1**, once **between February 2-February 29**, and once **between March 1-April 2**. Teams can set these meetings via the instructor's office hour scheduler (link on eLC).
- *Group Contribution Feedback*: Each team member evaluates the other team members' contributions to the group project. If a team member does not contribute meaningfully to the final product (or its various components), then the instructor may adjust that member's professionalization grade accordingly. These evaluations are due by **April 29 at 11:59pm**.

Grade Distribution

A	93.00-100.00	C	73.00-76.99
A-	90.00-92.99	C-	70.00-72.99
B+	87.00-89.99	D	60.00-69.99
B	83.00-86.99	F	Below 60.00
B-	80.00-82.99		
C+	77.00-79.99		

Course Policies

1. *Respectful Learning Environment.* All participants in the course will treat one another—as well as their ideas and comments—with respect. It is normal to make mistakes with difficult material, as well as to disagree in an academic setting. This disagreement, however, will occur respectfully in our class discussions. Towards the goal of creating a respectful, inclusive classroom environment, students will: (i) use language that does not insult others or their point of view, (ii) keep cell phones *turned off and put away* during our class meetings, and (iii) use laptops for educational purposes *only*. Any student that does not follow these guidelines may be asked to leave the classroom and/or remove the distracting technology.

2. *Course Material Copyright/Recording Policy.* The course material—including (but not limited to) all documents provided in the eLC course website, quizzes, graded assignments, handouts, and in-class lectures—are copyrighted. Students may therefore ***not*** record lectures (audio or video), distribute course materials, or post any content from the course online *without the instructor's express, written permission.* For the sake of student privacy, students may also ***not*** record our class sessions or meetings (audio or video). The instructor will automatically make exceptions to this policy for any student that obtains an accommodation to record course meetings through the Disability Resource Center. These exempted students, however, agree not to distribute the recordings (including online) *and* to destroy the recordings immediately after the course concludes.

3. *Attendance.* Class attendance is *required* for this course, particularly because some activities cannot be replicated (e.g., our discussions or in-class labs/exercises).

4. *Missing Class.* Students who are unable to attend a class meeting (i) will not receive credit for participating in that meeting and (ii) are responsible for obtaining any notes for that meeting from another student. The instructor will not provide slides or notes for class meetings.

5. *Make-Up/Extension Policy.* Make-up exams or assignment extensions *may* be offered, but *only* with the approval of the instructor—generally for documented, emergency situations. The instructor will administer any approved make-up exams during the course's regularly scheduled, semester final exam

period—on Thursday, May 2 at 12:00pm.

6. *Assignment Grade Appeal.* If a student believes that the instructor inaccurately graded an assignment, they may appeal that assignment's grade. To initiate an appeal, the student must—within two weeks of receiving the graded assignment—submit both the (originally) graded assignment *and* a written memo to the instructor. In this memo, the student should explain *in detail* why they believe the assignment grade should be different than the one originally assigned. The instructor will then review the memo, re-read the assignment, and issue a new grade. The new grade may be lower, equal to, or higher than the original grade and will not be subject to additional appeal under this policy.

7. *Academic Honesty.* As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to follow the University's academic honesty policy ("A Culture of Honesty") and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty," including policies that cover plagiarism and unauthorized assistance. Students are responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing and submitting any academic work. They may direct specific questions they have regarding the policy—or its application to course assignments—to the instructor. Please note that all suspected violations of this policy will be handled according to the guidelines set forth within the policy.

8. *Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools.* Students may not use word-mixing or artificial intelligence-based software (e.g., ChatGPT) to generate any part of the assignments required in this course. Those who do not adhere to this policy will receive a zero on the assignment in question and/or a failing grade in the course.

9. *Accommodations.* Students that require a potential accommodation (i) must register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) on campus (706-542-8719, http://www.drc.uga.edu), and (ii) should discuss any accommodations the DRC recommends with the instructor at the outset of the course.

10. *Exceptions and Modifications to Policies.* Any exceptions or modifications to the above rules (or more broadly, the syllabus) are given at the instructor's discretion, but only with *prior approval* and only under *extenuating* circumstances. Any exception/modification requires appropriate documentation from the student. (Note: In the case of illness, "appropriate documentation" means a doctor's note indicating an illness, rather than a medical visit verification form. Please schedule routine medical visits around the course schedule.)

Course Schedule

The general schedule for the course appears below. *The instructor may, as needed, announce deviations to this schedule, give further guidance on assignments, or alter assignments to meet course (or student) needs. If you are unclear about anything, please ask the instructor.*

Students should complete the readings/assignments listed under a class session *before* that class session begins. Please note that for readings, RLMO refers to the required textbook.

Unit	*Week*	*Date*	*Assigned reading*	*In class (lab)*	*Exams and Team Assignments due*
Introduction	1	Jan 11	• RLMO, Ch. 1 • *Analyst's Style Manual* • "Airline Close Calls…" (2023) • Charap et al. (2022) • ODNI (2021)	• Introductions • Course overview • Selecting research topics • Team creation	• None

Designs for description	2	Jan 18	• RLMO, Ch. 2 • Seawright & Gerring (2008) • Mahoney (2012) • Kertzer (2022) • Knopf (2006)	• Descriptive designs • Survey data • Case selection • Focus groups • Process tracing • Meta-analysis	• Research question
Designs for explanation	3	Jan 25	• RLMO, Ch. 3 & Ch. 12 (null and research hypotheses section only) • Powers and Renshon (2023) • Ross (2004) • Schenoni et al. (2023), including Appendix B	• Validity • Causal relationships • Generalizability • Experiments	• None
Measuring variables	4	Feb 1	• RLMO, Ch. 4 • Goertz (2020), Ch. 2-3 • Lai & Slater (2006) • Elkins (2019)	• Concept formation • Typologies • Measurement • Trouble-shooting measures	• Literature review • Instructor meeting #1
Sampling	5	Feb 8	• RLMO, Ch. 5 • Mullinix et al. (2015) • Dion & Mitchell (2020) • Habyarimana et al. (2007)	• Sampling	• None
Talking to subjects	6	Feb 15	• RLMO, Ch. 6 • Powell (2015) • Mendez (2020) • Goertz (2021)	• Surveys • Interviews • Focus groups • Exam review • Theoretical figures	• None
Data through questions	7	Feb 22	• RLMO, Ch. 7 • Suong et al. (2023)	• Question wording • Pre-testing • Zoom: Powell	• Exam #1
Human subjects research	8	Feb 29	• RLMO, Ch. 8 • McDermott & Hatemi (2020) • Beber et al. (2017) • Kao & Revkin (2023)	• Ethics • Confidentiality • Processes for protecting human subjects	• Theoretical argument • Instructor meeting #2
Using existing data	9	Mar 14	• RLMO, Ch. 9 • Nalepa & Powell (2015) • Gibler, Miller, & Little (2016) • Colpus dataset codebook (find & examine)	• Using big data • Data lab	• None

Indices	10	Mar 21	• RLMO, Ch. 10 • Bernhard et al. (2017) • Goertz et al. (2023) • Jackson et al. (2022) • Strüver & Wegenast (2018)	• Creating indices • Replication	• None
Univariate analysis	11	Mar 28	• RLMO, Ch. 11 • Samii (2013) • Owsiak et al. (2021) • Bruck (2015)	• Data analysis • Data visualization • Descriptive statistics • Factor analysis	• Instructor meeting #3 (by Apr. 2)
Bivariate analysis	12	Apr 4	• RLMO, Ch. 12 • Mitchell & Owsiak (2021) • Goldring & Matthews (2023) • Wolford (2019), Ch. 2	• Hypothesis testing • Bivariate statistics • Statistical v. practical significance • Formal models	• Research design • Circulate full paper draft to class
Nominal and ordinal variables	13	Apr 11	• RLMO, Ch. 13 • Mousseau (2009) • Hartzell & Hoddie (2015) • Berejikian & Zwald (2020)	• Contingency tables • Exam review	• Peer written feedback
Regression and correlation	14	Apr 18	• RLMO, Ch. 14 • Owsiak (2013)	• Interpreting regression results • Model fit	• Exam #2
Presenting research findings	15	Apr 25	• RLMO, Ch. 15	• Best practices • Archiving replication data • Course conclusion	• Paper presentations

**** Final research paper and group contribution feedback due April 29 at 11:59pm ****
(via related eLC assignment dropboxes)