

INTL 6010: Research Methods in International Policy

University of Georgia, Department of International Affairs

Course Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-14:00 & by appt.

Course Meeting Information

Fall 2024
Tuesdays, 9:35am-12:25pm
115 Candler Hall (IA Building)
<https://uga.view.usg.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., identify unsubstantiated theoretical or empirical claims, or note shortcomings)
- Synthesize existing research—and marshal it in support of an argument/purpose
- Make a theoretical argument, which includes conceptualizing key terms, elaborating assumptions, outlining the argument’s logic, and deriving hypotheses
- Determine the methodological approach and data needed to evaluate an argument, being mindful of any limitations that accompany them
- 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 research 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 (or any profession) 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 (e.g., questions or critiques), (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 October 1 and November 19.
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. For more details, see the Policy Paper Analysis Assignment (on eLC).
4. *Diplomacy Lab* (40% total, as divided below). Professional work often involves collaboration and research. To develop these skills—and to better prepare students to undertake their individual capstone project later in the degree program—students complete a collaborative research project under the State Department’s Diplomacy Lab initiative. A detailed description of this project, as well as a list of its expected deliverables, appears on the course website. Students will work toward those deliverables through the following components and deadlines:
 - *Collaborative Literature Review* (10%): A 3 to 5-page, focused synthesis of research on electoral systems and their key characteristics (or another project-relevant theme). This is due **September 10**.
 - *Collaborative Country Report* (10%): A 5-7-page report on the electoral system within a specific Latin American country. This is due **October 8**.
 - *Additional Research Tasks* (10%): Students choose to either (i) draft a section of the final written report that integrates the research contained in the individual country reports, (ii) compile, analyze, and visually present data derived from the various individual country reports (and other sources), or (iii) complete an additional country report. This is due **November 5**.
 - *Reflection* (10%): A 2 to 3-page reflection paper that connects the student’s work on the Diplomacy Lab project with the other course material. This is due **December 3**.
 - *Final products*: A full draft of all expected project deliverables is due **December 3**.
 - *Project Presentation*: The class presents (i.e., gives a briefing on) its final project—and hands over the deliverables—to the State Department on **December 10**.

- *Meetings with Instructor.* Students will meet with the instructor *at least* three times during the semester—once **before September 10 (team)**, once **between September 11-October 8 (team)**, and once **between October 9-November 5 (team or individual)**. Teams and individuals can set these meetings via the instructor’s office hour scheduler (link on course website).
- *Group Contribution Feedback:* The instructor will ask each student to evaluate the contribution of other members of the students’ collaborative team(s). If these evaluations indicate that a particular student has not contributed meaningfully to the final products or their various components, then the instructor may adjust the student’s grade accordingly. These evaluations are due **December 3**.

Grade Distribution

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|----|--------------|----|-------------|
| 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.
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, December 5 at 8:00am.
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. *Please note well:* The instructor may—as needed—make changes to this schedule, give further guidance on assignments, or adjust assignments to meet particular 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. Under assigned reading, RLMO refers to the required textbook.

| <i>Unit</i> | <i>Week</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Assigned reading</i> | <i>In class (lab)</i> | <i>Exams and Team Assignments due</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|--|--|--|
| Introduction | 1 | Aug 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to Be a Graduate Student • RLMO, Ch. 1 • Goertz (2021) • “Airline Close Calls...” (2023) • ODNI (2021) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Course overview • Causal arguments • Diplomacy Lab • Team creation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Designs for description | 2 | Aug 27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 2 • Seawright & Gerring (2008) • Mahoney (2012) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive designs • Survey data • Case selection • Focus groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |

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| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kertzer (2022) • Knopf (2006) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process tracing • Meta-analysis | |
| Designs for explanation | 3 | Sep 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 3 & Ch. 12 (null and research hypotheses section only) • Powers and Renshon (2023) • Ross (2004) • Schenoni et al. (2023), including Appendix B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity • Causal relationships • Generalizability • Experiments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Measuring variables | 4 | Sep 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 4 • Goertz (2020), Ch. 2-3 • Lai & Slater (2006) • Elkins (2019) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept formation • Typologies • Measurement • Trouble-shooting measures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review • Instructor meeting #1 |
| Sampling | 5 | Sep 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 5 • Mullinix et al. (2015) • Dion & Mitchell (2020) • Habyarimana et al. (2007) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sampling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Talking to subjects | 6 | Sep 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 6 • Powell (2015) • Mendez (2020) • Goertz (2021) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Interviews • Focus groups • Exam review • Theoretical figures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Data through questions | 7 | Oct 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 7 • Suong et al. (2023) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question wording • Pre-testing • Zoom: Powell | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam #1 |
| Human subjects research | 8 | Oct 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 8 • McDermott & Hatemi (2020) • Beber et al. (2017) • Kao & Revkin (2023) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics • Confidentiality • Processes for protecting human subjects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country Report • Instructor meeting #2 |
| Using existing data | 9 | Oct 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 9 • Nalepa & Powell (2015) • Gibler, Miller, & Little (2016) • Colpus dataset codebook (find & examine) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using big data • Data lab | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Indices | 10 | Oct 22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 10 • Bernhard et al. (2017) • Goertz et al. (2023) • Jackson et al. (2022) • Strüver & Wegenast (2018) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating indices • Replication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |

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| Univariate analysis | 11 | Oct 29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 11 • Samii (2013) • Owsiak et al. (2021) • Bruck (2015) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis • Data visualization • Descriptive statistics • Factor analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Bivariate analysis | 12 | Nov 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 12 • Mitchell & Owsiak (2021) • Goldring & Matthews (2023) • Wolford (2019), Ch. 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypothesis testing • Bivariate statistics • Statistical v. practical significance • Formal models | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional research tasks • Instructor meeting #3 |
| Nominal and ordinal variables | 13 | Nov 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 13 • Mousseau (2009) • Hartzell & Hoddie (2015) • Berejikian & Zwald (2020) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency tables • Exam review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Regression and correlation | 14 | Nov 19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 14 • Owsiak (2013) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreting regression results • Model fit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam #2 |
| Presenting research findings | 15 | Nov 26 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RLMO, Ch. 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practices • Archiving replication data • Course conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Final course deadlines | | Dec 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group contribution feedback • Reflection • Final products (drafts) |
| Final project deadlines | | Dec 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project presentation • Final products |