POSC 6101: Contemporary Political Research

Marquette University, Dept. of Political Science
Fall 2020; Monday 4:00-6:40, Lalumiere 272

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Online Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-4:00 or by appointment in MS Teams

Course Overview:
The purpose of this course is to introduce students to fundamental ideas in political science methodology, research design, and analysis. Upon completion of this course, you should be able to identify, assess, and critique the methodology used in published articles in the discipline. This includes understanding the logic of regression analysis, the comparative method, and case study research. You also should have the first pieces in place to embark on your own research project, if you choose to do so.

This course proceeds in three units. The first part of the course is devoted to a set of overarching concepts and considerations central to social science methodology. We will discuss the basic components that motivate any research project in the positivist social sciences: a research question, hypotheses, variables, and causation. In the second unit, we address quantitative (i.e. more than 30 cases) strategies for data collection and analysis, including regression, experiments, and working with observational data. The third unit deals with qualitative research designs, including strategies for analysis (case studies, process tracing) and for collecting data (interviews, ethnography, archival research).

Course Objectives:
1. Acquire the tools to read and critique research design in Political Science readings.
2. Learn how to design a research project and to write the “research design” section of an academic paper.
3. Identify and apply norms of ethical research, including the use of humans as research subjects.

Student Assessment:
Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Research Questions Memo (Due 9/11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Variable Design Memo (Due 10/2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Research Designs (4 x 15% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>In-Class Presentation, Discussion Leader</td>
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**Participation**
You are expected to attend every class session, as health permits. If you must miss a class due to illness or some other exceptional circumstance, please notify the professor no later than the day before class. Participation is also part of your grade. As a seminar-style course, it is essential that students have completed the assigned reading prior to showing up for class and are prepared to discuss it.

**Research Questions Memo**
Students will prepare three research questions. These questions may deal with the same topic or may be unrelated. Revised versions of these research questions will form the motivation for the research design memos that students will write throughout the semester. Research questions should include both an independent variable and a dependent variable. They do not have to follow this exact formula, but the basic idea is to ask: “What is the effect of X on Y?” For example: “What is the effect of natural disasters on the popularity of the incumbent executive?” or “How is education policy shaped by economic inequality? For each research question, students will write one paragraph about the puzzle that the question relates to, based either on existing literature or observations from the real world. *This is due on Friday, September 11 in the D2L Dropbox. I will hold extra office hours this week and strongly recommend that you attend to discuss your questions.*

**Variable Design Memo**
Students will analyze one variable (e.g., either an independent variable or dependent variable from one of their research questions). In these memos, students will (1) conceptualize the variable then (2) operationalize and discuss strategies for measurement TWICE: (a) for a qualitative research design and (b) for a quantitative research design. The operationalization and measurement should be different across the two versions, as a qualitative design allows for much greater complexity than a quantitative design. *This is due on Friday, October 2 in the D2L Dropbox.*

**Research Designs**
The main written assignment in the course are four research designs, which should be roughly 1,500 words each. You can choose which weeks during the semester that you would like to write these (weeks 8 through 14). Students are encouraged to come to class on Monday ready to discuss their research design as we will spend considerable time workshopping these. *Memos are due by Friday of the corresponding week and should be submitted to the D2L Dropbox.*

Each of these will include the following components:
1. Research question
2. One or two hypotheses to be tested
3. Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement of 2-3 main variables
4. Description and justification of data collection technique and case selection
5. Description and justification of data analysis strategy
In-Class Presentation, Discussion Leader
During weeks 8 through 14, each student will have one class where they act as discussion leader and presenter. That day, the student will have three responsibilities:

1. Submit list of 8-10 discussion questions to D2L Discussion board by 12:00pm on the day of class. These should be based on all of the required readings for the week. If there are multiple discussion leaders in a given week, they may coordinate in preparing these questions or may submit separate lists of questions.
2. Throughout this session, the leader(s) will share the responsibility with me to move the conversation along and to involve their classmates in discussion.
3. Present and critique one of the “exemplar” readings in roughly 15 minutes during the second part of class. (If you would like to choose an alternative reading that is not on the list of exemplars, great! I only ask that you verify your selection with me in office hours or over email in the week prior to your presentation.) If there are multiple discussion leaders, they should not present the same exemplar. These presentations should address the following questions:
   - What is the research question?
   - What are the main independent and dependent variables and how are they measured?
   - What is the research design strategy?
   - What are the pros and cons of the chosen strategy? What would the potential payoff have been to choosing a different strategy?

Required Readings:
You are required to attain copies of the following two books. These books are available at Bookmarq, the university bookstore, or you may acquire them through alternate means.


Additional readings will be posted to D2L. Most of these are mandatory, but at times I post recommended readings. These will be noted as recommended in the syllabus below.

EXEMPLARS:
For most weeks of the course, I include a list of “exemplars” readings. These are examples of applications of the research method that we are discussing during that class session. You should come to class with some familiarity with at least two of these exemplars. If you would like to find additional readings that use that method and come prepared to discuss those as well, please do so! I’m happy to help students identify exemplar readings in office hours. During weeks where we have a guest speaker, exemplars by that guest speaker will be mandatory reading for the whole class and I will ask you to choose one additional exemplar to read from the list optional exemplars.
Course Policies:

**Communication**
- *Office hours:* Office hours are for you, the student. Please come to discuss course material, assignments, or any other thoughts or concerns you may have.
- *Checking your email:* I expect you to check your email daily. I will send course announcements over email. It is your responsibility to make sure that the email account that is registered in D2L is the one that you check regularly.
- *Professor’s email:* If you have a very short clarifying question, it may be appropriate to email the professor. I only ask that prior to emailing me you consult the syllabus and ask your classmates to see if it is something that has already been covered.

**Laptops and Other Electronic Devices**
Research has shown that students retain information better when they take notes by hand than when they take notes on a computer. For this reason, I have a no-device policy in my classroom. Laptops may only be used by those with special learning needs that have consulted with me in advance. If you need advice on how to take notes effectively using paper and pen, you can come to office hours and I can suggest note-taking strategies. Cell phones should be turned off during class. If you have a special need to keep your cell phone on, such as to monitor a sick child, see me before class and I will make an accommodation.

**Academic Dishonesty**
All students have participated in training activities at Marquette to learn about what constitutes academic dishonesty. Any instance of academic dishonesty in this course such as plagiarism, copying others’ work, or consulting unauthorized sources during exams will be handled according to university policy. Violating students will automatically receive a zero on the assignment or exam in question and be referred to the Marquette University Honor Council: [http://www.marquette.edu/provost/integrity-index.php](http://www.marquette.edu/provost/integrity-index.php). If you have any uncertainty about whether you are adhering to academic honesty standards, please consult with me in advance.
Course Schedule:

**Week 1: Introduction (Aug. 24)**

**Week 2: Methodology and Research Design (Aug. 31)**

Gerring, ch. 1


**Week 3: Research Questions (Sept. 7)**

*NO CLASS, LABOR DAY, EXTRA OFFICE HOURS, SEPT. 8, 9*

***Submit Research Questions Memo by Friday Sept. 11 in D2L Dropbox***

Gerring, ch. 2-4


RECOMMENDED:


**Week 4: Philosophy of Science and Public Engagement (Sept. 14)**

***VISIT FROM PROFESSOR JULIA AZARI***


Visit the following websites with examples of public scholarship: Monkey Cage, Scholars Strategy Network, Mischiefs of Faction, Democratic Erosion Consortium

RECOMMENDED:

Popper, Karl. “Science: Conjectures and Refutations”


Week 5: Variables—Conceptualization (Sept. 21)

***VISIT FROM PROFESSOR LOWELL BARRINGTON***

Gerring, ch. 5-6


REQUIRED EXEMPLAR:


OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):


Week 6: Variables—Operationalization and Measurement (Sept. 28)

***Submit Variable Design Memo by Friday Oct. 2 in D2L Dropbox***

Gerring, ch. 7

Spiegelhalter, ch. 1-2


REQUIRED EXEMPLAR:


OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):


Week 7: Inference and Causation (Oct. 5)

Gerring, ch. 8-9

Spiegelhalter, ch. 3-4

REQUIRED EXEMPLAR:


OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):


**Week 8: Quantitative Approaches—Experiments (Oct. 19)**

Gerring, ch. 10


Dunning, Thad. Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences, *Chapter 1*.


**REQUIRED EXEMPLAR:**


**OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):**


**Week 9: Quantitative Approaches—Regression (Oct. 12)**

Spiegelhalter, ch. 5, 9, 10


**REQUIRED EXEMPLAR**


**OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):**


**Week 10: Quantitative Approaches—Surveys and Observational Data (Oct. 26)**

***VISIT FROM PROFESSOR PHILIP ROCCO***


**REQUIRED EXEMPLAR:**


**OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):**


**Week 11: Qualitative Approaches—Case Studies (Nov. 2)**


RECOMMENDED:


OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE TWO):


Week 12: Qualitative Approaches—Process Tracing and Historical Methods (Nov. 9)

***VISIT FROM PROFESSOR MARK BERLIN***


MANDATORY EXEMPLAR:

Berlin, Mark S. Criminalizing Atrocity, chapter 5: “The Criminalization of Atrocities in Guatemala”

OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):


Week 13: Qualitative Approaches—Field Research (Nov. 16)

***VISIT FROM PROFESSOR JESSICA RICH***


MANDATORY EXEMPLAR:

OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):


Week 14: Qualitative Approaches—Ethnography (Nov. 23)

***VISIT FROM PROFESSOR NOELLE BRIGDEN***

Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read, chapter 7.


MANDATORY EXEMPLAR:


OPTIONAL EXEMPLARS (CHOOSE ONE):


