POLS 208: Research Design
Emory University
Spring 2016

Meeting room: White Hall 207
Meeting times: Monday and Wednesday, 8:30am – 9:45pm
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Office hours: Monday, 10:00am–11:00am or by appointment

Course Description
This course provides an introduction to the theory and method of contemporary political analysis. The course covers how to formulate research questions, theoretical models and empirical hypotheses; how to design a research plan; and how to communicate the results of a study. The course introduces common research strategies for descriptive and causal inference, which students will use to conduct original research in a group setting. POLS 208 is mandatory for majors in Political Science or International Studies at Emory University. The department strongly encourages all students to take this course during their first two years to prepare themselves for upper-level coursework.

Course Goal
The goal of this course is to prepare you to read, interpret, critique and construct research in political science. In particular, you will be able to evaluate strategies for descriptive and causal inference in political science applications.

Grading
Your final grade is a weighted average of the following components:

Participation (10%) I expect you to be present. I expect you to be prepared. Preparation means that you have read the assignment before class and that you are ready to discuss it. When we discuss particular research studies, you should prepare summaries of each paper. Your summary should identify the research question, describe the theoretical argument, empirical research design and results. Part of my evaluation of your performance in class will be influenced by my interaction with you. Part of my evaluation will be influenced by how I observe you interact with others. In the event that you do not understand all that you have read, you need to be prepared to ask questions. I may take attendance during the semester. You are absolutely required to attend any class in which we host an outside guest.

Midterm Exam (25%) and Final Exam (35%) The midterm exam will be administered in class on February 29. It will evaluate your comprehension of all material covered through
February 22. The final exam will be administered on May 2 at 11:30 am in White Hall 207. The final will evaluate your comprehension of all course material.

**Group research project (30%)** Each student will complete a research project as a member of a team. The results of the project will be communicated via a research paper, a hard copy of which must be turned no later than April 29 at 4:30 pm. The paper may be delivered to Tarbut 327. The project will involve original empirical research on a topic of the teams choosing that addresses a theoretically-grounded research question of interest to political scientists. The team will be expected to design and carry out a study to evaluate a single hypothesis or set of hypotheses pertaining to the political phenomenon under study. Your goal will be to use an empirical study to draw a causal inference related to your hypothesis. For example, you might seek to answer whether a decrease in economic growth causes states to be vulnerable to regime change. Each team should begin to consider possible research topics as soon as possible. Teams are strongly encouraged to consult with the instructor as they develop their project. Specifically, projects develop in the following stages.

1. **Team Construction (January 25)** Teams are comprised (ideally) of four students. Team members are expected to be familiar with and contribute to the entire project; however, each member will play one of four leading roles: (1) Team Leader, (2) Theoretical Leader, (3) Design and Data Leader, (4) Writing Leader. The Team Leader is primarily responsible for overall organization and communication with the instructor. Team Leaders should ensure that research advances according to the plan. The Theoretical Leader is primarily responsible for ensuring that the papers literature review is coherent and useful. She is also responsible for ensuring that the theoretical argument and empirical hypotheses are clearly articulated. The Data and Design Leader is primarily responsible for ensuring that the empirical design is clear, that appropriate data are collected and analyzed according to the designs procedures. The Writing Leader is primarily responsible for ensuring that the paper gets written and ultimately speaks with one voice. The instructor will assign students to teams and select team leaders.

   In order to assist the instructor in the construction of research teams you are required to answer a brief survey no later than January 21.

2. **Topic Proposal (February 8)** Teams must propose a research topic in writing by February 8. A research topic describes generally the subject of your analysis. For example, topics include concepts like violent conflict, terrorism, voting behavior, economic development, rights protection, or government formation. Your teams proposal should specify a topic and suggest several lines of inquiry that might be of interest to team members. So, for example, suppose that you are interested in the topic of violent conflict. You might be interested in understanding why very weak states sometimes engage in conflict with very powerful states. You might also be interested in the ways that conflict might influence development or the distribution of wealth. The instructor will approve topics on February 10 or require the team to make a new proposal.

3. **Individual Literature Reviews (March 2)** Each team member must conduct his/her own literature review. Your literature review should summarize at least 15 academic articles

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1Obviously, all students in the class are encouraged to speak with the instructor about questions and concerns.
on your topic. A summary of the literature review is due via Blackboard on March 2. We will discuss the precise format of this summary in class.

4. Research question (March 4) Teams must propose research questions in writing submit them via Blackboard by March 4. A research question proposal must offer a precise, researchable question. So, for example, whereas regime survival is a topic, it is not a research question. A research question on the topic of regime survival is: Do natural resource reserves destabilize democratic regimes? The research question proposal should articulate why this question is important and what implications there will be of answering it correctly.

5. Research plan (April 6) Teams will submit in class on April 6 a research plan, which will serve as a first draft for your final paper.

6. Final draft (April 29) The final draft is due on April 29 by 4:30, as described above. A final paper should include the following components:

   (a) An introduction in which you explain the relevance of the topic and specify your research question.

   (b) A literature review in which you discuss prior efforts to answer this question.

   (c) A theoretical argument (this does not need to be an original argument. You can "borrow" one from your literature review). This argument should give an answer to the research question you propose. It should provide an explanation. So, if you are asking whether natural resources destabilize states, then your argument has to explain the mechanism by which it does or does not.

   (d) An empirical implication of your argument, which you can test empirically (using a quantitative or qualitative design).

   (e) An empirical design section, in which you explain how you will use observable information to draw a causal inference. This section should include a discussion of the measurement of your key concepts.

   (f) A results section in which you present the outcomes of your study. Your results section should also address threats to your inference.

   (g) A conclusion that relates your study back to the general topic. You should discuss implications of your research and new questions that have emerged.

In addition, you must submit to our course Blackboard site a replication folder. You replication folder should contain the original data that you used for your study. You should also include a replication statement, outlining the procedures that you used to draw the inferences you drew. The goal is to make it possible for another person to be able to conduct the same study without having to speak to you about what you did. We will speak in class about precisely how you can ensure that your study can be replicated. Finally, please include an electronic copy of your paper.

Grades for the group project will be allocated accordingly.

   (a) Overall paper grade (60%) Each team member receives credit equally for the overall assignment.
(b) Individual literature review (10%) Each team member receives credit individually for his/her personal literature review summary.

(c) Group assessment (15%) Each team member receives credit individually for the groups evaluation of his/her contribution to the group.

(d) Role assessment (15%) Each team member will receive credit individually for the role that he/she played in the project. This evaluation will be done by the instructor. To help the instructor make this assessment, each team member will submit a self-assessment of his/her work on the assignment.

Readings

We will use one textbook. Other readings are either available for free via the library’s electronic resources or made available to you at the course’s electronic reserve. Here is the textbook we are using.


Incomplete Grades

No incomplete grades will be given unless there is an agreement between the instructor and the student prior to the end of the course. The instructor retains the right to determine legitimate reasons for an incomplete grade.

Late Assignments

You will be penalized for late assignments or missed exams, unless the absence/delay is due to documented serious illness or is otherwise excused by the instructor in advance (such as for certain official Emory-sponsored activities). The penalty for unexcused late papers is one full letter grade per day. In this course, the policy applies directly and clearly to the individual literature review, the exams and the final draft of the paper. Failure to submit on time the topic and question proposals as well as the rough draft will be penalized via the overall paper grade. An example helps clarify. Suppose that your group produces A level work (a 95 out of 100 points for example) on your final paper, but you submitted your rough draft one day late. You will all receive a B for the overall course grade (i.e., 85 out 100) component of the research project assignment.

Extra-Credit Work

Under no circumstances will extra credit work be permitted.

Email and Social Media

I expect you to check your email. You are responsible for the material I send electronically. The is a Facebook group for this course. I encourage you strongly to pay attention to the information distributed there. It will be related to and help inform the course.
Blackboard

Here is a Blackboard site for this course. You will submit your replication folder here. I will post the syllabus and lecture notes.

Final Course Grades

Final course letter grades will reflect the Department of Political Sciences grading standard, detailed below. Clearly, it is impossible for each assessment to reflect the standard exactly. Instead, the assessments, taken as a whole, are designed to produce a final grade that reflects the departments standards.

A Exceptional Performance Consistently outstanding work on all course-related tasks at a level that distinguishes the student from other members of the class. A comprehensive and incisive command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A frequently demonstrated exceptional capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. The ability to master and integrate large amounts of factual material and abstract theories. An outstanding ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

A- Excellent Performance Consistently strong work on all course-related tasks. A comprehensive command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A clearly demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. Understands well and can integrate the relevant factual and theoretical material central to the course. A strong ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

B+ Very Good Performance Consistently above average work on all course-related tasks. A very good grasp of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A generally demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical, and logical thinking. A very good command of factual and theoretical material, and some capacity to integrate the two. A solid ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

B Good Performance Good and generally consistent work on all course-related tasks. A general understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Modest evidence of the capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. A good understanding of factual and theoretical material, but limited evidence of the capacity to integrate the two. A basic ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

B- Satisfactory Performance Satisfactory work on course-related tasks. A reasonable understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. An infrequently demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. Understands at a basic level the facts and theories related to the course, but demonstrates weak
integration skills. A limited or inconsistent ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

**C+/C/C- Adequate Performance** Adequate performance on course-related tasks. An understanding of the basic elements of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A rarely demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking (C+). An inability to go beyond a recitation of basic factual material related to the class (C). Demonstrated weaknesses in the ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills (C-).

**D/D+ Minimal Passing Performance** Barely acceptable work on course-related tasks. A generally superficial and often inconsistent familiarity with the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A failure to demonstrate the capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking related to course content (D+). An uneven understanding of basic factual material related to the course; no evidence of fact/theory integration. Demonstrates significant gaps in the ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills (D).

**F Unacceptable Performance** Fails to meet minimum course expectations. Unable to understand even the most basic elements of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Demonstrates an inability to engage in coherent written or oral discussion of course material. Does not satisfy specific course expectations with respect to attendance, deadlines, participation, etc.

**Integrity of Scholarship**

The honor code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from the teachers instructions about collaboration on work that is submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that the teacher is entitled to move you to another seat during examinations, without explanation. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the honor council.

**Access, Disability Services and Resources**

Emory University is committed under the Americans with Disabilities Act and its Amendments and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to providing appropriate accommodations to individuals with documented disabilities. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, provide the instructor(s) with an accommodation notification letter from Access, Disabilities Services and Resources office. Students are expected to give two weeks notice of the need for accommodations. If you need immediate accommodations or physical access, please arrange to meet with instructor(s) as soon as your accommodations have been finalized. Further information is available at [http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/index.html](http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/index.html).
Class schedule

January 13: Course Introduction

January 18: MLK Day (No class meeting)

January 20: Your Research Project
RvR, Chapter 17

January 25: Questions, Concepts, Models and Measures
RvR, Chapter 2
Research teams constructed

January 27: Questions, Concepts, Models and Measures 2
RvR, Chapter 4

February 1: Questions, Concepts, Models and Measures 3


February 3: Statistics Review (Descriptive Statistics)
RvR, Chapters 6, 7 and 8

February 8: Statistics Review (Inferential Statistics)
RvR, Chapters 5 and 9
Research topic due

February 10: Statistics Review (Inferential Statistics)
RvR, Chapter 10
Topics approved

February 15: Statistics Review (Regression)
RvR, Chapter 10

February 17: Causation
RvR, Chapter 11
February 22: Randomized Experiments

RvR, Chapter 14


February 24: Paper Workshop

February 29: MIDTERM EXAM

March 2: No class

Literature reviews due

March 4 – There is no class

Research questions due

March 7 and March 9: Spring Break

March 14: Emory Library Resources

March 16: Randomized Experiments in the Field


March 21: Using Regression to Estimate Causal Effects

RvR, Chapters 12 and 13

March 23: Natural and Quasi-Experiments

RvR, Chapters 15, pp. 466-484

March 28: Difference-in-Differences
RvR, Chapters 15, pp. 484-490


March 30: Regression Discontinuity
RvR, Chapters 15, p. 492


April 4: Instrumental Variables
RvR, Chapters 15, pp. 490-492


April 6: Process Tracing
Chapters 10, 11, and 12 of Rethinking Social Inquiry


April 11: Case Studies
RvR Chapter3, pp. 76-86


Rough draft due
April 13: Counterfactual Thought Experiments
Chapters 4 and 10


April 18: Marcus Autism Center (I hope)
Reading: TBA

April 20: Michael Alexander, Atlanta Regional Commission
Reading: TBA

April 25: The Ethics and Politics of Research
RvR Chapter 16

Please be on the look out for a few popular press articles on this subject.

April 29: **FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER due by 4:30 pm**

May 2: **FINAL EXAM**

11:30 a.m. in White Hall