

## Public Opinion Research Project

*Due Dates:*

Research Design: Oct. 12

Literature Review: Nov. 7

Data Analysis: Nov. 21

Final product: Nov. 30

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*Purpose and Goals:* One of the goals of a 500-600 level “Craft of Research” class in the political science major is that you conduct original research: testing a claim by collecting and analyzing raw data. This project is designed to help you fulfill that goal while also offering insight into the ways public opinion is used by community organizations to further their goals. Over the course of the semester, we will collaborate with a community partner to identify a question of interest to them, decide how to best gather opinions about that question, and then actually collect and interpret responses from Georgetown residents.

**This semester, we will work with RISE Georgetown to understand the Georgetown community’s knowledge, attitudes and action around the city’s school board.** What do Georgetown community members know about the politics and process of school board elections and meetings? What are their expectations of schools in meeting their needs and the needs of their children? And what would motivate them to (keep) turn(ing) out in school board elections?

Early in the semester, we will meet with the members of RISE Georgetown to discuss the social and political context of Georgetown ISD, the recent school board elections, and their goals as an organization. During that meeting, we will finalize the overarching research questions that will guide our project. Assignments are interspersed throughout the semester to help keep you on track—each new assignment builds on the work you did previously. All components of the research project should be turned in on Moodle at the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. Assignments will not be accepted as email attachments or hard copies unless explicitly stated. Below, I outline the expectations for each assignment, culminating in the final paper at the end of the semester.

### **The Research Design (100 points)**

Your first assignment will be to think about how we can measure or “operationalize” the concepts that are central to answering our question. How we can capture the relevant opinions of the Georgetown community?

In this paper, which you will submit individually, you will make a case for the use of a particular research design. This paper will contain two primary components:

- *The Research Plan/Design:* How would you go about researching our question? How would you collect evidence and what kinds of evidence will you draw from to explore the question? Think practically about how we will carry out our research and provide a justification for why it makes sense for us to study our research question in the specific way you propose: justify how we should collect evidence and articulate how that method relates to our question. I encourage you to use course material in your justification. (2-3 paragraphs)

- *Method of Analysis/Research Instrument*: This section is closely related to the section above, but even more specific in terms of asking you to think through the method you have proposed to analyze our question. It spells out the procedures you will follow in detail and lists the specific questions you would ask. The precise length and format will vary depending on your approach. For a structured survey experiment, this section should list the exact questions you would like to include in our survey. For in-depth interviews and focus-groups, this section should list the specific topics you will cover and should include a series of questions and follow-up prompts that you might employ, although because of the fluid nature of these research techniques your actual conversations with participants may wander. Ultimately, this section should include three parts:
  - A description of your target population and sampling strategy (1-2 sentences). We will **not** have a representative sample of Georgetown residents, but I do want you to think about how we can reach a range of people within the community and be as unbiased as possible in our approach.
  - The instrument itself.
  - A description of how the material in the instrument (questions, coding categories, etc.) relate to the research question. Why are you asking these questions? (1-2 paragraphs) I encourage you to draw on the research we've discussed in class, as well as questions asked by major research organizations (Pew, Gallup, the National Election Studies) in designing your research instrument.

In class, we will discuss different proposals and, in collaboration with RISE members, decide what approach(es) is (are) the most feasible and what questions or other information we might like to collect.

### **The Literature Review (100 points)**

Most academic papers include a literature review, which takes stock of prior academic research and how our work will fit into the broader scholarly conversation. For this independent, 2-3 page paper, you will put one topical focus of our project in academic context. **The section you focus on will correspond with the topic that you give your presentation on in class.**

In your literature review, you'll focus on what existing scholarship has to say about the concept you are focusing on. What does political science (or other disciplines) have to say about people's political knowledge? The most effective ways to mobilize people? How have previous research findings varied in formulation and in the answers given? This section should constitute a short bibliographical essay, touching upon works dealing with the problem or topic with which you are concerned. Note that this "literature review" is not an annotated bibliography of everything that has been done in the field. References to the literature must be specifically related to your question or argument and integrated into a coherent, cohesive set of paragraphs. There is no set number of sources that you are expected to use in this assignment, but the number should be adequate enough that you can give an overview of research that has been done related to your topic. You are encouraged to use both the articles assigned for class and those you found in creating your presentation in your literature review.

The literature review should be set up thematically and centered around the theories, concepts, and relationships that are most relevant to our research question. In most cases, you will spend

few paragraphs talking about a single author or book. Instead, you will make an argument for how the reader should interpret all of the research that has already been done. We will talk more about how this looks in a paper in class.

### **Data Collection & Analysis (100 points)**

We'll spend late October and early November collecting data using the research instruments we have created and agreed upon. For this assignment, you will select **one relationship between variables** (for example, gender differences in school board knowledge, or assessments of fairness across electoral systems) to analyze. In 1-2 pages you will:

- Explain what variables you are analyzing, hypothesize the direction of the relationship, and provide basic descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, percentage) for each
- Depict the relationship graphically, either through a table or a figure.
- Describe the relationship between the two variables, reflect on whether the data supports your hypothesis, and articulate the implications of the relationship—why does it matter for our larger project?

### **Final Products (200 points)**

In capstone, you will be required to present your research orally and in the traditional academic format. However, outside of the university setting, most research like our project will contain similar information presented in alternative frameworks. Thus, in producing your final assignment for the semester, you will get to choose the format through which you convey all the different components of research that we have worked on over the course of the semester. Each product will be a collaborative effort, with teams designed around the type of product you would like to work on. However, you will also turn in a list of each group member's contributions to the project, which I will use to adjust individual grades for the assignment as needed.

You can choose to do any of the following:

1. *Create a written report for the community partner.* This approach will most directly mirror the traditional research paper that you will be expected to do in capstone or graduate school, if you are interested in pursuing that path post-graduation. Keep in mind that these reports also tend to be more aesthetically pleasing than the traditional academic essay. You can see examples [here](#) and [here](#), and watch a tutorial on how to make an “e-book” in PowerPoint or Google Slides that will give you more design flexibility [here](#).
2. *Present our findings orally to the community partners.* RISE Georgetown members will come back to our class at the end of the semester to hear what we've found. This group will be responsible for designing a 20 to 30-minute overview presentation of everything we've found over the course of the semester.
3. *Record your experience as a podcast.* This group will write and record a podcast, translating a scripted conversation about our research and findings into an audio segment that we can share with the university and Georgetown community. The library has recording technology that you can use, and I encourage you to check out [these](#) NPR and [New York Times](#) resources on how to design a podcast.
4. *Design a set of infographics and brief textual descriptions that could be posted on social media or disseminated to the community.* This group will focus on data visualization and

the key takeaways from the project that might be helpful for outside audiences—the Georgetown community or even currently elected school board members—to understand in a quick and easily digestible framework.

Regardless of the approach you take, your final product should cover the following components of our project: All of these things should be included, regardless of what approach they take:

- The research question(s) we wanted to answer
- A brief background of the topic, overview of the academic literature, and how our project fits into that literature. Unlike in the literature review assignment, where you focused exclusively on one topic that related to our question, this discussion should incorporate literature across all relevant topics.
- An explanation of our research design and methodology: how we collected our data, why we chose that approach, who responded, and what we asked.
- Four to five of the most important findings as they relate to our research question(s), presented in a clear and easily interpretable manner.
- An explanation of why your question and findings matter to political science and to the Georgetown community.

### **General Logistics**

All papers should be double-spaced, using 12-point, Times New Roman (or equivalent) font and 1-inch margins. Citations should be formatted according to scholarly and disciplinary norms, using Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*, a guide to the Chicago Manual of Style. The honor code should be written and signed on each assignment. Papers should be proofread for grammar, style and clarity.

If you are having problems or if you have any questions at any point, please come see me!

## Evaluation Criteria: Research Design Assignment

<b>METHOD OF ANALYSIS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifies a methodological approach that will be used to test hypotheses.</li><li>• Explains why this approach is appropriate for answering the research question.</li><li>• Provides enough detail about the method being used that someone unfamiliar with the project could replicate it.</li></ul>	30 points
<b>RESEARCH INSTRUMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides the actual questions that will be asked (surveys, experiments, interviews, focus groups).</li><li>• Each question is clearly related to the research question.</li></ul>	30 points
<b>WRITING:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Persuasively advances argument in language that is clear, coherent, concise, and grammatically sound</li></ul>	20 points
<b>MECHANICS AND PROCESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional spelling, grammar, and punctuation</li><li>• Double-spaced, 1" margins, 12-point Times New Roman (or equivalent) font.</li></ul>	20 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	100 points

## Evaluation Criteria: Literature Review

<p>LITERATURE REVIEW:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Groups research thematically, rather than listing individual articles or authors.</li><li>• Includes a wide range of authors and sources (no set limit, but remember that the final rubric requires a “deep understanding” of previous work)</li><li>• Advances an argument about how the different works relate to one another and help us understand, evaluate, or investigate our question.</li></ul>	75 points
<p>MECHANICS AND WRITING PROCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional spelling, grammar, and punctuation</li><li>• Double-spaced, 1” margins, 12-point Times New Roman (or equivalent) font.</li><li>• Persuasively advances argument in language that is clear, coherent, concise, and grammatically sound</li></ul>	25 points
<p>TOTAL</p>	100 points

## Evaluation Criteria: Final Product

<p>“Proficient” means the criteria listed below have been fulfilled with a more advanced level of competence; “Meets expectations” means that the criteria have been fulfilled in a satisfactory way; “Below expectations” means that some of these criteria have been neglected or inadequately addressed.</p>	<p><b>Below expectations</b></p>	<p><b>Meets expectations</b></p>	<p><b>Proficient</b></p>
<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION:</b> Identifies a relevant, appropriate, and manageable puzzle or problem as an area of substantive research, clearly articulates research question, explains the significance of this question to the study of politics</p>			
<p><b>ARGUMENT:</b> Outlines the explanation that best addresses your research question and articulates the overall argument that will be asserted.</p>			
<p><b>LITERATURE REVIEW:</b> Approaches the research question from multiple competing perspectives, taking different counter-arguments into account, and reviews the relevant existing literature to demonstrate a deep understanding of different approaches to how this topic has been explored and to provide a disciplinary context for the project.</p>			
<p><b>METHOD OF ANALYSIS:</b> Demonstrates an understanding of how to implement the most suitable and appropriate method of analysis to the research question</p>			
<p><b>EVIDENCE:</b> Analyzes a broad and appropriate body of facts and data to assert the argument, using primary and secondary sources appropriate to the discipline of political science as evidence; also addresses (if necessary and as needed) relevant competing arguments and inconvenient facts.</p>			
<p><b>WRITING:</b> Persuasively advances the argument in language that is clear, coherent, concise, and grammatically sound</p>			
<p><b>ORGANIZATION:</b> Organizes the paper clearly and logically</p>			
<p><b>REVISION:</b> Integrates and responds to feedback, constructive criticism, and suggestions for revision</p>			
<p><b>CITATION:</b> Cites evidence according to scholarly and disciplinary norms, using Kate Turabian’s <i>A Manual for Writers</i>, a guide to the Chicago Manual of Style.</p>			