

Individual Research Proposal

POLS 2399 – Fall 2019

The goal of this assignment is to start thinking through how you might contribute to research in the social sciences. This will be a chance to show that you understand the basics of the research process as outlined this semester, and that you can use that understanding to think through ways to answer a question that is important to you.

You will be developing a research proposal or “prospectus” that will outline:

- your research question
- the existing literature
- your own theory or set of hypotheses, and
- a proposal for how you would test them.

While you will not carry out the latter steps of the research process (data collection, analysis, re-engagement with the theory and literature), you should come out of this assignment with a project that you could actually carry out in the coming semester or year, if you want!

If any of you do decide to pursue this, you would most likely be able to do so as part of a senior capstone, a senior thesis, or as part of a fellowship program like the [Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavor Award](#) (UGRCE). To help make this assignment reflect what this would be like in practice, assume that you have the following constraints:

- You have a faculty member advising you
- You have exactly one semester to complete the project (from first data collection to submitting a completed conference paper or thesis)
- You have a grant from a faculty member’s research budget or a UGRCE award that gives you a budget of \$1,000 (maximum) to access datasets not available at Northeastern, to conduct fieldwork, to run an experiment, etc.

You are free to study any topic in (or closely related to) political science that you wish!. You can use the interest-gathering handouts from the first few classes to help narrow your interests to a specific research question.

Assignment One: List of Sources (Due 10/31)

As with any research project, your broader goal is to find out what has been said before and make sure that you are contributing to and advancing that conversation. Your first step is determining what, exactly, you need to read to understand the conversation. For this first part, you just need to make a draft list of what you are planning to read. The focus should be on tracking down sources that will help us understand how others have studied this and similar questions in the past.

For this project, make a list of at least six scholarly resources you plan to read to form the basis of your literature review. Most of these should be academic books and peer-reviewed journals; conference papers and reports or other materials are acceptable but should be limited. For this assignment, you just need to read the abstract or enough of the article to know that it will be helpful in writing your literature review—you don't have to have read the whole thing yet.

Please submit:

- a) A draft statement of your research question. (This should just be a few sentences at most).
- b) The list of at least six resources in the form of full citations for each work, following [American Political Science Review](#) Style (see "Examples of References"), with each item followed by a 1-2 sentence description of why you think this resource relates to your research question

Assignment Two: "Designing Your Project" Handout (Due 11/18)

This assignment comes directly from the (optional) assigned textbook by Lisa Baglione, and it will have its own instructions. You will fill out this four-page worksheet, which asks about questions like cases, operationalization, and measurement, based on the specific research you are proposing to carry out. This will help you think through what the final proposal needs to contain, and it will help you to identify what you still need to work out conceptually before writing up the proposal.

Assignment Three: Draft Literature Review (Due 12/2)

This will be the first draft of the literature review you will include your final proposal. Your goal is to summarize the current state of the research—what is the current conversation on this topic, what competing theories already exist, and what questions remain to be answered or need to be resolved?

Some questions you might want to reflect on in this assignment:

- What is each author's argument? What is the question they're answering or puzzle they're trying to solve, and what is the theory they have?
 - Be brief; your goal is now to summarize and compare, not elaborate
- Do different studies rely on mostly the same or mostly different evidence?
- How well do they do it? What is effective about their ideas and/or their data? What flaws can you spot in the evidence they have or the logic they use?
- Which pieces agree with each other, and who disagrees with whom?
 - Are the disagreements over facts, definitions, or something else?

You'll want to synthesize these into regular prose, and try to organize them around theories and findings, rather than simply explaining each work in sequence (we'll spend some time on this in class on 11/25).

Your draft literature review should be around 3 to 5 pages, not including footnotes and references. You should include all or most of the sources from the first assignment, and you may want to use this opportunity to add additional works that either cite or are cited by the sources in the first assignment. You will need to cite at least 8 sources for your final paper...and *the earlier you start reading the easier the rest of the assignments will be.*

Assignment Four: Final Proposal (Due 12/11)

For the final paper, you will submit a full research prospectus that includes the following:

1. An introduction setting up the research question
2. A literature review, explaining where this research question fits into the existing literature on your topic, and setting up either a question to be answer or a conflict to be resolved
 - a. You will want to expand and revise your draft literature review, but you are free to use it as the basis for the literature review and re-use parts of your writing.
 - b. Use at least 8 sources (and these should be mostly or entirely scholarly sources)
3. A description of your hypotheses
4. A description of the data you plan to collect, and an explanation of how this data tests your hypotheses. You should propose to use at least two different methods (for example, existing survey data and a new survey of a different population, or content analysis and a set of interviews)
 - a. If you know of existing data you could use (existing surveys or datasets), describe them here and show how you might use this data to test your theory

- b. If you would need to collect data on your own, describe the kind of data you would need. If you would need to access government statistics, what would they measure? If you would run a survey, what questions would you ask and what would your sample frame be? If interviewing, who would you interview and what kinds of questions would you ask? If doing content analysis, what kinds of texts would you examine?
5. A discussion of what the implications for the academic conversation would be if your hypotheses are confirmed or contradicted.
6. If you would need to spend money to conduct this research, an appendix with a basic itemized budget estimate (remember you have \$1,000 maximum in this scenario!)

Not counting appendices, tables, and a "works cited" section, this proposal should be between 10-15 pages.

Extra Credit Assignment Five: Conference Abstract (Due 12/11)

To think about how you might engage with the scholarly community, you have the option of submitting a draft conference application. If you do this assignment, you will find an appropriate academic conference in Summer/Fall 2020 at which you could present your proposed research, and write an abstract and application, following that conference's guidelines for undergraduate presenters. This will likely be at a political science association (there are a number of regional ones, and you need not live or study in that region to participate) or at a broad undergraduate research conference. *Figuring out an appropriate venue is part of the assignment.*

Usually, this is just a title and a 200 or 250-word "abstract" of the paper, which you can find examples of online. But check the requirements for the conference you choose!

You do not have to actually submit a proposal (and probably most of you won't) but if you *are* interested, please let the instructor know so that we can talk through the process once the semester ends, and before you submit---this can be a great opportunity to jump deeper into the field if you are thinking about getting further involved in research!