

POLS 2399 – Research Methods – Fall 2019

Mon/Thurs 11:45am – 1:25pm, Ryder 452

Instructor: Dr. Colin M. Brown

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Overview

This class is for students who wish to learn how to conduct and evaluate social science research. For students who plan to write a senior thesis or capstone paper, to help a professor conduct original research, to consider graduate school, or to consider what constitutes “evidence” in law school, to work in a consulting firm, research is one of the most important skills you need to learn. The goal of the class, as elaborated in the learning goals below, will be to assess scholarly literature in political science, to identify interesting research questions, to formulate strategies for answering them, to utilize the methodological tools that will best help you conduct the research, and to present the results of your research in presentations, papers, and policy briefings.

The course will combine a mix of traditional lectures, workshops on how to carry out research (and write up the results), opportunities to critique published social science research, and first-hand experience planning and conducting research. The first part of the class will go over the broad nature of social science research, as well as its underlying philosophies; this section culminates in a midterm exam. The middle part of the class will introduce specific methods such as experimental design, interviewing, and surveying, as well as additional theory of research design; students will spend much of this middle section working in a group to answer a question that is trickier than it might first appear: where is the best place to get lunch on campus? The last part of the class will continue introducing tools that students may develop in later courses, and will focus on a proposal for a senior thesis/capstone project.

Learning Goals

Students will be able to:

- Identify a number of research methods used in political science, and explain the assumptions and goals of each method.
- Evaluate and critique the methods used in contemporary political science research.
- Develop a research question(s) from an interest in any particular topic of political science.
- Design and propose social science research using qualitative and/or quantitative methods that match their research question.
- Communicate effectively in written and oral formats relevant to the field of political science.
- Recognize additional research techniques that may be developed in later courses or by doing research.

¹ (there are other people with my name at Northeastern---double-check who you’re sending it to!)

Texts

- Required: Jeffrey C. Dixon, Royce Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits, The Process of Social Research (DS&S)
- Recommended: Lisa Baglione, Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods, CQ Press 2015 (LB)
 - Only one chapter is required, but you may find the rest of the book helpful, especially with the final project!

Assignments

Final course grades will be calculated from total percentages, without rounding — A: 94% or above, A-: 90% to 93.99%, B+: 87% to 89.99%, B: 83% to 86.99%, B-: 80% to 82.99%, C+: 77% to 79.99%, C: 73% to 76.99%, C-: 70% to 72.99%, D+: 67% to 69.99%, F: 66.99% or below.

Assignments are due by the beginning of class on the date indicated.

- **CITI Extra Credit Assignment: +1.5%** (10/3)
 - Complete the required online training assigned by Northeastern's IRB to begin human subjects research in the social and behavioral sciences.
- **Midterm Exam: 10%** (10/17)
- **"Best Lunch on Campus": 35% Total:** Students will work in groups practice the basics of some research methods by determining the best place to get lunch on campus. Which involves, for example, defining "best", "lunch", and "on campus", among other things...
 - **Pre-Literature Review: 2.5%** (10/7)
 - **Concepts and Measurements: 2.5%** (10/17)
 - **Sampling & Procedures: 5%** (10/24)
 - **Group Presentation: 10%** (11/7)
 - **Group Writeup, 6-10 pages: 15%** (11/7)
- **Individual Research Proposal: 45% Total:** Students will develop a research proposal for a project that could be carried out as a senior thesis or capstone project.
 - **List of Sources: 5%** (10/31)
 - **"Designing Your Project" Handout: 5%** (11/18)
 - **Draft Literature Review: 10%** (12/2)
 - **Final Research Proposal: 25%** (12/11)
- **Conference Abstract Extra Credit: +1.5%** (12/11): Students will find an appropriate conference at which they could present their proposed research in 2019-20, and write an abstract and application to present
 - You do not need to actually apply (but hopefully a small number of you will)!
- **Participation: 10%:** Students are required to attend all lectures, participate in classwide discussions, and fully contribute to their group projects. If you are worried about your participation grade, or if you feel uncomfortable participating in class, please come see the instructor for help with strategies to help you take a more active role in a way that works for you.

Course Schedule:

September 5: Introduction

- DS&S Chapter 1 & 2

September 9 & 12: Theories, Paradigms, and Ontologies

- (for 9/9) Keith Dowding, The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science, 2016, Chapter 2 "Isms" | Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 1962, pp. 10-42

September 16 & 19: Introduction to Research Design and Research Questions

- (For 9/16) DS&S Chapter 4
- (For 9/19) Lisa Baglione, Writing a Research Paper in Political Science (3rd Ed.), 2016, Chapter 2

September 23: Research Ethics

- DS&S Chapter 3

September 26: Case Selection and Case Studies

- John Gerring, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?," American Political Science Review, 2004

September 30 & October 3: Concepts & Measurement

-NIH Extra Credit Assignment Due 10/3

- (For 9/30) James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," American Political Science Review, 2003 | Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad," International Security, 2008 | Northeastern University Library Guide: "Political Science: Research Essentials"
- (For 10/3) DS&S Chapter 5 | Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," American Political Science Review, 2003 | James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State, 1998, pp. 22-33

October 7 & 10: Surveys & Sampling

-BLoC Pre-Literature Review Due 10/7

- (For 10/7) DS&S Chapter 6 & 8

October 17: In-Class Midterm Exam

-BLoC Concepts & Measurements Due 10/17

October 21 & 24: Interviewing

-BLoC Sampling & Procedures Due 10/24

- (For 10/21) DS&S Chapter 9 | Robert L. Peabody et al, "Interviewing Political Elites," PS: Political Science and Politics 1990
- (For 10/24) Choose one: A) Helen Marrow, "New Immigrant Destinations and the American Colour Line," Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2009 or b) Wendy Pearlman, "Moral Identity and Protest Cascades in Syria", British Journal of Political Science, 2016

- *Recommended (For 10/24): Daisy Verduzco Reyes, "Inhabiting Latino Politics: How College Shapes Students' Political Styles," Sociology of Education, 2015.*

October 28 & 31: Experiments

-Final Project: Draft List of Sources Due 10/31

-No Formal Class Meeting 10/31: You will sign up in small groups for a 1-hour field trip

- (For 10/28) DS&S Chapter 7
- (For 10/31) Jeffrey W. Lucas, Corina Graif, and Michael J. Lovaglia, "Misconduct in the Prosecution of Severe Crimes: Theory and Experimental Test," Social Psychology Quarterly, 2006 | Melissa Sands, "Exposure to Inequality Affects Support for Redistribution," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 2017

November 4 No Formal Class Meeting – Use this time to work on your group project and/or to meet as a group with the instructor

November 7: The Best Lunch on Campus - Presentations

-BLoC Presentations and Write-ups Due 11/7

November 14: Causality & Game Theory

- Henry W. Brady, "Causation and Explanation in Social Science," from The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology, 2008 (p. 217-249 only)
- Judea Pearl & Dana MacKenzie, The Book of Why, 2018, Chapter 1 "The Ladder of Causation"

November 18 & 21: Content Analysis

-Final Project: "Designing your Project" Worksheet Due 11/18

- (For 11/18) DS&S Chapter 10 (*Section on "Comparative Historical Analysis" optional*) | Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China"
 - *you only need to skim this speech, but be ready to refer to it for an in-class exercise and bring a printed copy to class!*
- (For 11/21) Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," American Political Science Review, 2013

November 25: Literature Reviews

- Raul Pacheco-Vega's Blog: "[How Many Sources Are Enough?](#)" & "[Forward Citation Tracing and Backwards Citation Tracing in Literature Reviews](#)" | Jeffery Knopf, "Doing a Literature Review," PS: Political Science and Politics 39(1) 2006: 127-132 | Lisa Baglione: "Ten Rules to Write By"
- *Recommended: DS&S Chapter 14*

December 2: Peer Review and Conclusions

-Draft Literature Review Due 12/2 (Bring 2 printed copies to class!)

- DS&S Chapter 11

Policies

Late Assignment Policy

The midterm exam is a scheduled, seated examination. Postponements or makeup exams will not be scheduled except in situations as outlined in the [Northeastern University Attendance Requirements](#) and only with prior approval of the instructor. Group projects will be scheduled for in-class presentation, and so also cannot be late.

However, it is understood that students have a high workload and many different priorities during the semester. Therefore, any one component of the individual project may be turned in late, with no explanation needed. If you need to take this extension, simply e-mail the instructor before the due date indicating that your paper will be late. If the assignment is turned in less than 24 hours late, no grade penalty will be imposed; alternatively, it can be turned in up to one week late at a 10% grade penalty (only the 24-hour option is available for the final draft). Papers received more than one week late or without notification will not receive credit and may not receive instructor feedback. You may only take this extension once in the semester.

Academic Integrity

The Department of Political Science takes very seriously the issue of academic honesty, and as set forth in Northeastern University's principles on Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy (the complete text can be found at [Northeastern University's Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#)). Any student who appears to violate these principles will fail the course and will be put on academic probation. Individual faculty, with the support of the Department, can impose harsher penalties and as they deem necessary. *Cheating* is one example of academic dishonesty, and which is defined as using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. When completing any academic assignment, a student shall rely on his or her own mastery of the subject. Cheating includes *plagiarism*, which is defined as using as one's own the words, ideas, data, code, or other original academic material of another without providing proper citation or attribution. Plagiarism can apply to any assignment, either final or drafted copies, and it can occur either accidentally or deliberately. Claiming that one has "forgotten" to document ideas or material taken from another source does not exempt one from plagiarizing. Your instructor will clarify specific guidelines on fair use of material for this class.

Correct citation practices and academic honesty are an expectation of this course, but are also a skill students need to learn (and often need guidance on). If you are uncertain what to do in a situation, do not hesitate to ask the instructor beforehand to avoid creating a larger issue later.

Resources

Accommodations

Northeastern is fully committed to creating a community characterized by inclusion and diversity. As part of this commitment, it upholds the American with Disabilities Act as Amended of 2008 and the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act, referred to collectively as the ADA. The ADA requires Northeastern to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities unless doing so would create an undue hardship, compromise the health and safety of members of the university community, or fundamentally alter the nature of the university's

employment mission. Students seeking information regarding ADA accommodations should review the University's ADA Information and Resources Procedure available at <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc>.

All disability accommodation requests must be processed through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and cannot be arranged by the instructor. However, if you need help contacting the DRC or are uncomfortable doing so on your own, please feel free to ask the instructor for assistance.

While there is no formal university-wide student-parent policy, it is the instructor's intent that be a welcoming space for diversity in parenting or caregiver status. Please do not hesitate to contact the instructor about arranging accommodations (e.g., if there disruptions in normal childcare) that will facilitate your full participation in the course.

Campus Resources & Services

Students may face many barriers to learning in the course of their education, such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, strained familial or romantic relationships, and others. Northeastern University provides you with a number of resources that may help you in whatever challenges you face, and help you find the space to succeed in your studies. [University Health and Counseling Services](#) (617-373-2772) has a wide variety of resources open to you, as do the centers and offices below:

- [Center for Spirituality, Dialogue & Service](#)
- [Dolce Center for the Advancement of Veterans and Servicemembers \(CAVS\)](#)
- Global Student Success, including the [International Tutoring Center](#) for help with English-language learning and academic success, [Language & Culture Workshops](#), and [Reading Workshops](#)
- [Northeastern University Police Department](#)
- [Northeastern Writing Center](#) for help with written work at any stage or type of assignment
- [Peer and Alumni Mentoring](#)

Title IX

Northeastern is committed to providing equal opportunity to its students and employees, and to eliminating discrimination when it occurs. In furtherance of this commitment, the University strictly prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, religious creed, genetic information, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, ancestry, veteran, or disability status. The Northeastern University [Title IX policy](#) articulates how the University will respond to reported allegations of sexual harassment involving students, including sexual assault, and provides a consolidated statement of the rights and responsibilities under University policies and Title IX, as amended by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.

Northeastern understands that some survivors of harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct or other violations of this policy may not be ready or willing to report through a channel (such as to the Title IX Office or your instructor that could result in university action. For such individuals, the following confidential resources are available:

- [ViSION Resource Center \(VRC\)](#): (617) 373-4459
- University Health and Counseling Services (UHCS)
- Clergy in the Center for Spirituality, Dialogue and Service