

Political Science 308/Geography 308

Research Design

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Course Description

Our focus in this course is on methods for doing scientific empirical social science research. That is, we will learn together about how to acquire knowledge about politics and geography. We will examine research sources, designs and methods used by political scientists and geographers. Students will learn how to locate and access data, and will study the logic of causal inferences. We will also explore basic data presentation and analysis.

All of you already have some stock of relevant research methods. You know something about politics and geography, and you learned that information somehow. This course is an opportunity to deepen your knowledge (in the present and in the future). The goal is to learn how to study and investigate using scientific methods in more careful, systematic, and efficient ways: how to approach problems; how to frame research questions; how to gather information; how to structure information you have gathered using statistics. I hope that you will work hard to learn to distinguish between bad, indifferent, mediocre, good and excellent scientific thinking.

Research Design 308 is a research methods course taken by all political science and geography majors. As a 'fundamentals' course in major requirements and a general education information literacy course, this class should be taken early in your academic career. In this course you will learn how to locate, access, and evaluate the information you need to answer research questions, and will study the logic of drawing appropriate inferences as it is applied in the fields of political science and geography. In order to develop the ability to identify, evaluate, apply, and ethically use information we will study how to approach and define problems; how to frame research questions; how to gather information and data, and evaluate the accuracy of that information; and how to structure information into a summative research project. The course examines the tools used by political scientists and geographers and explores the mechanics of research presentation and writing to help majors prepare for successful completion of upper-division requirements.

Graded Requirements

The final grade in this course will be computed according to the following scale:

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D	63-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	F	0-62
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72		

Required Readings

Pajo, Bora. 2017. Introduction to Research Methods: A Hands on Approach. Sage University Press, Los Angeles, CA. ISBN-13: 978-1483386959

Supplemental Web Resources

The following is a web site with short summaries/explanations reinforcing key concepts covered in the textbooks. Go to the web site and the “table of contents” page. Click on the subject heading that is listed on your required reading. Trochim, William M. The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition. Internet WWW page, at URL: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/contents.php>

William Strunk’s classic “The Elements of Style” can be purchased in the bookstore in the edition coauthored by E.B. White, or you can view it online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html>

Exams: 50 Percent

This course will have a midterm exam and a final exam. The midterm will be 25 percent of the overall grade, and the final will be 25 percent of the overall grade.

The exams will include short answer, short essay, and matching/multiple choice components. Some questions on the exams will bear a strong family resemblance to questions in the homework assignments, but others will not. Exams will draw on readings, lectures, information literacy modules, and class discussions. The final is cumulative.

Exams will require students to demonstrate their understanding of each of the components of the course objectives including understanding and applying the logic of social scientific research and the scientific method; determining the nature and extent of information needed for research; identifying and analyzing strategies for finding information effectively and efficiently; demonstrating a capacity to critically evaluate information and information sources; sketching appropriate strategies for developing a research project; and understanding the economic, social, legal, and ethical issues surrounding the access and use of information. Exam review study sheets will be available one week before each exam.

Homework and other brief assignments: 25 percent

Homework assignments will require that you to demonstrate a capacity to apply course ideas to specific problems. For instance, you will be required to describe an effective information search strategy appropriate for research on a specific topic; you will be assigned the task of identifying source types (journal articles, popular articles, books...),

and you will be asked to identify and evaluate specific research designs including for instance evaluation of the quality of particular survey questions or sampling designs.

Homework 1 focuses on familiarizing students with how to use various search engines and library resources to find scholarly sources.

Homework 2 focuses on analyzing types of research questions and identifying appropriate approaches to answering them (e.g. empirical, philosophical); and on identifying the nature and extent of information needed for research.

Homework 3 focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of particular research designs and the types of inferences that can be drawn from particular designs; on identifying and describing the way in which particular concepts are being measured; and on appropriate and inappropriate search strategies for identifying information and resources related to your topic.

Homework 4 focuses on developing the ability to apply qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques in order to extract information on a topic from documents, interviews, and observation.

The **research ethics assignment** focuses on developing understanding of the economic, social, legal, and ethical issues surrounding the access, collection, and use of information. Go to the following website: <https://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php> and complete the online course. Once you have finished, print proof that you passed (e.g. the certificate) and bring it to class. This assignment is graded pass/fail. If you get the certificate, you pass.

A series of **assignments keyed to your research design project** will help you learn how to apply your information literacy and research design skills as you develop the summative research design project. Specific projects include an analysis of the quality of several information sources; a literature review that includes an in-depth evaluation and critical review of sources and their relationships; identification of key hypotheses in the literature; and development of a research strategy suitable for testing hypotheses related to your research question.

Final Research Design Project: 25 percent.

The research design project is the main summative project of the course. This project requires students to critically evaluate the literature on a topic of interest (35 percent), identify and develop three important hypotheses or claims from that literature (20 percent), and design a research strategy appropriate for gathering information needed to evaluate the hypotheses (35 percent). In addition, you will need to collect some preliminary data (10 percent).

Important Course Information

All University policies are in full force and effect in this course.

College Classroom Conduct

The following standards are intended to define acceptable classroom behavior that preserves academic integrity and ensures that students have optimum environmental conditions for effective learning.

1. Students must turn off cell phones and pagers during class or have them set to vibrate mode.
2. Classes are expected to begin on time, and students will respect the time boundaries established by the professor. If classroom doors are locked, students may not knock or seek entrance in other ways.
3. Students should notify instructors in advance when a class will be missed. In the event of an emergency that causes a class to be missed, instructors must be notified as soon as possible.
4. Instructors may require that cell phones and other electronic devices be left on their desks during tests or examinations.
5. Students must not engage in extraneous conversations during classes. Such acts are considered to be violations of the Code of Student Conduct.
6. Students will activate their Old Dominion email accounts and check them before each class. If the student chooses to have his/her messages forwarded to another account, it is the student's responsibility to take the necessary steps to have them forwarded.
7. Consumption of food and drink during class is prohibited, except when the professor has specifically approved of such acts.
8. Offensive language, gestures and the like are disrespectful and disruptive to the teaching-learning process. [http://studentservices.odu.edu/osja/ccp_pamphlet.pdf]

Honor Code: The Old Dominion University Honor Code is in effect at all times in this class. Your name on an exam, paper, or homework assignment constitutes your acceptance of the Honor Code:

“I pledge to support the Honor System of Old Dominion University. I will refrain from any form of dishonesty or deception such as lying, cheating, and plagiarism, which are honor violations. I am further aware that as a member of the academic community it is my responsibility to turn all suspected violators of the Honor System. I will report to an Honor Council hearing as summoned.”

Plagiarism: “A student will have committed plagiarism if he or she reproduces someone else’s work without acknowledging its source; or if a source is cited which the student has not cited or used. Examples of plagiarism include: submitting a research paper obtained from a commercial research service, the Internet, or from another student as if it were original work; making simple changes to borrowed materials while leaving the organization, content, or phraseology intact; or copying material from a source, supplying proper documentation, but leaving out quotation marks. Plagiarism also occurs in a group project if one or more of the members of the group does none of the group’s work and

participates in none of the group's activities, but attempts to take credit for the work of the group." Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. (For more information: <https://wp.odu.edu/plagiarism/>)

Late Assignments: Punctuality is essential. In order to incentive punctuality, late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per class meeting late. If you know in advance that you will be forced to turn in an assignment late due to travel, illness, sports, clubs etc... Contact me before the class the assignment is due to make alternate arrangements.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcomed and unsolicited conduct of a sexual nature, physical or verbal, by a member of the university community of the opposite sex (or the same sex) in an official university position. Sexual harassment in any situation is prohibited. It is the policy of Old Dominion University to provide students and employees with an environment for learning and working which is free of sexual harassment whether by members of the same sex or the opposite sex, which is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. (For more information: <http://www.odu.edu/ao/polnproc/pdfs/6320.pdf>)

Students with Special Needs: In compliance with PL94-142 and federal legislation affirming the rights of disabled individuals, provisions will be made for students with special needs on an individual basis. The student must be identified as "special needs" by the university and provide a letter from the Office of Educational Accessibility (OEA) located in 1525 Webb Center. Any accommodations will be based upon written guidelines from the OEA. Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term, (*September 8*). Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although I may contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation. All students are expected to fulfill all course requirements.

E-mail: Students are required to use valid Old Dominion University email accounts to send official information and notices and are held responsible for accessing electronic mail to obtain official University communications. Students should use their secure ODU email account to communicate with professors.

Course Evaluations: Student evaluations provide important feedback for me, and they are an essential component of departmental and university-wide measures of teaching effectiveness. Please fill them out when the time arrives.

Career Management Center: The Career Management Center offers a Career Advantage Program, which provides opportunities to gain work experience related to your major through internships, cooperative education or practical experience outside the classroom. The College of Arts and Letters has career coaches to assist in this process by providing help with resumes, cover letters, job search strategies, and interviewing skills. You may

stop by the office in BAL 1006 (tel. 757-683-4388) or email cmc@odu.edu for more information. Their website is <http://www.odu.edu/ao/cmc/index.php>.

Disclaimer

This syllabus is subject to change with notice. Any changes will be posted to the course website and either e-mailed OR announced in class, or both.

Course Schedule (Subject to Change):

January 8th: Syllabus Day

January 10th: The Purpose of Research (Chapter 1)

January 12th: The Purpose of Research (Chapter 1)

January 15th: No Class—MLK Holiday

January 17th: Formulating a research question (Chapter 2)

January 19th: Formulating a research question (Chapter 2)

January 22nd: Formulating a research question (Chapter 2)

January 24th: How to Properly Use Search Scholarly Engines

January 26th: Researching and Writing a Literature Review (Chapter 3)

January 29th: Researching and Writing a Literature Review (Chapter 3)

January 31st: Quantitative Designs (Chapter 4)

February 2nd: Quantitative Designs (Chapter 4)

February 5th: Quantitative Designs (Chapter 4)
(Homework 1 due)

February 7th: Quantitative Designs (Chapter 4)

February 9th: Measurement (Chapter 5)

February 12th: Measurement (Chapter 5)

February 14th: Measurement (Chapter 5)

February 16th: Sampling (Chapter 6)

February 19th: Sampling (Chapter 6)
(Research Ethics assignment due)

February 21st: Sampling (Chapter 6)

February 23rd: Quantitative Data Collection (Chapter 7)

February 26th: Quantitative Data Collection (Chapter 7)

February 28th: Quantitative Data Collection (Chapter 7)
(Homework 2 due)

March 2nd: **Midterm Exam**

March 5th—March 9th: No Class—Spring Break

March 12th: Secondary Data (Chapter 8)

March 14th: Secondary Data (Chapter 8)

March 16th: Entering and Organizing Quantitative Data (Chapter 9)

March 19th: Entering and Organizing Quantitative Data (Chapter 9)

March 21st: Analyzing Quantitative Data (Chapter 10)

March 23rd: Analyzing Quantitative Data (Chapter 10)

March 26th: Qualitative Designs (Chapter 11)
(Homework 3 due)

March 28th: Qualitative Designs (Chapter 11)

March 30th: Qualitative Designs (Chapter 11)

April 2nd: Working with Qualitative Data (Chapter 12)

April 4th: No Class—MPSA Conference

April 6th: No Class—MPSA Conference

April 9th: Working with Qualitative Data (Chapter 12)

April 11th: Summarizing Results (Chapter 13)

April 13th: Summarizing Results (Chapter 13)

April 16th: Summarizing Results (Chapter 13)

April 18th: Presenting Research (Chapter 14)
(Homework 4 due)

April 20th: Presenting Research (Chapter 14)

April 23: Open Date

April 25th: Final Exam (12:30 PM)