

# PS381: Introduction to Research Design

Professor Jenna Bednar

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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:30am to noon, 7725 Haven

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Office Hours: T 1:30–3:30pm, Th 10-noon, 7602 Haven

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In this course you will learn how political scientists define questions about our political world and how we go about answering those questions. Political science is an eclectic field; while we are loosely united by the study of governance, the questions that we ask, and the ways that we go about answering them, take many forms. This course will introduce you to some of the ways that political scientists think about their research and prepare you to begin to do your own original research. The course requires teamwork and independent effort. It requires exploring other scholars' work, trying to make sense and learn from it. It requires developing your own ideas and sharing them with others.

The course has two related goals. One is to expose you to various approaches to conducting research in political science and to learn to identify what makes political science research a contribution to the field. The second goal is to provide you with a framework to identify a problem that you can tackle in a research project by placing the problem within the discipline, designing a methodology for investigating the problem, and proposing a tentative outline for an argument. The course also emphasizes communication of ideas; we will devote several course periods where we work together to present ideas orally and in writing.

The course satisfies the LSA Upper-Level Writing Requirement. This course is also a required gateway into the Political Science Honors Program. Students who complete this course successfully may apply for admission into the political science honors program.

## Learning Goals

There are many assignments throughout the term. Some are directly related to your final project, a major research proposal. Some assignments are not related to it, but will help you develop ideas, approaches and methods for the proposal. Some assignments are collaborative. I've designed each assignment to give you the opportunity to emulate the kind of work a professional political scientist does. As you complete the assignments you will gain practice with the following skills:

1. Reading skills: The ability to critically read and evaluate social science research, identifying a research contribution and placing it within a relevant literature.
2. Research skills: The ability to formulate a research question and take the appropriate first steps to begin answering it. You will also identify the coursework you will need to develop skills in advanced social-scientific methodologies.
3. Writing skills: The ability to express your plans clearly, including using non-verbal visual rhetoric.
4. Communication skills: The ability to express your main points orally and in a poster presentation, with an emphasis on being concise and piquing interest.

Early in the semester we will divide you into small groups based on the interests you express in your "pitch". Those small groups serve as peer review and workshoping groups.

## Resources

You will need to purchase one book: Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 4th edition. Amazon lists it at \$10 new, \$5 used, and the kindle

edition at \$6.71. In other words it is cheap, available in many forms, and you'll find it handy. All other required course readings are available online, mostly through the UM Library's electronic holdings.

You will each need to purchase a 3-fold poster board (36" X 48") for an individual presentation at the end of the semester, and within small groups, you'll need one more. They cost about \$4.

You may find these optional texts useful. All are inexpensive and easy to read.

1. Strunk & White. The classic guide to writing.
2. Deirdre N. McCloskey, *Economical Writing*. An often funny update on Strunk & White. Your writing will be made far crisper by following her advice. One immediate hint: do a global search and delete of the word "very" and your paper will be instantly improved.
3. Umberto Eco, *How to Write a Thesis*. Originally written in Italian and published 40 years ago, it has just been published in English. While some specific advice may feel dated (notecards!), the general advice about thesis construction is useful across the humanities and social sciences.
4. G. Polya, *How to Solve It*. Advice from a clear-minded mathematician about how to think about the construction of an argument.

## **To Contact Me**

Email (jbednar@umich.edu) is best. I respond to email daily except on weekends. My office hours are Thursdays 10:30 to noon in 7725 Haven Hall. I am also almost always available after class.

## **The Course Assistant**

This course is supported by Sweetland Writing Center with the goal of developing your writing skills. Sweetland makes it possible for me to have an assistant who has been trained to work with students on their writing. This year Diogo Ferrari will assist me in teaching the course and will be responsible for helping you to develop your writing and analytical skills. Diogo is a student of comparative political economy and has extensive experience

developing formal models and teaching statistics. He will be an exceptional resource for you. His office hours are Tuesdays 1:30 to 3:30pm and Wednesdays 10am to noon, in 7602 Haven Hall (although his office hours may change later in the semester; watch for an announcement). You can contact him at [dferrari@umich.edu](mailto:dferrari@umich.edu).

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at least two weeks prior to the time when the accommodation will be needed. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; <http://www.umich.edu/sswd>) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

## **Academic Honesty and Valuing Diversity**

The University of Michigan maintains very high standards for academic integrity among its faculty and students. Honest conduct includes committing never to steal another's ideas, writing, or research. In this course you will learn proper attribution of sources and be rewarded for your research. Any breach of academic integrity, including plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsification of data, or any other form will result in a zero for the assignment. If the breach is more than a single line, the student will receive a zero for the course and be reported to the college, a result that often ends in academic probation for the first offense and expulsion for the second. My expectations are high, and happily, in 15 years of teaching nearly every student has met those expectations.

I maintain an open dialogue and encourage discussion in each class period. We each have our own understandings, based on our own experiences, past instruction, and private information. We will all learn much more if each of us feels free to express our perspective, regardless of how different it might

be from others in the room. Sometimes that means listening to a perspective that differs from your own. Mutual respect benefits us all.

**Table 1: List of Dates for Writing Assignments and In-Class Work**  
 UL = Assignment must be written and uploaded to CTools. All others are in-class only.

	<b>Date Due</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
UL	9/14	Upload 3 Political Science Questions [3 pts]
	9/22	Your Pitch [3 pts]
UL	10/6	Annotated Bibliography [3 pts]
	10/6	Groupwork: Abstract Construction [3 pts]
	10/15	Literature Review Draft [3 pts]
UL	10/22	Literature Review Due [20 pts]
UL	11/17	Workshop Comparison Paper Due [20 pts]
	11/19	Groupwork: Group Presentation Preparation [3 pts]
	11/24	Group Poster Presentation [10 pts]
	12/3	Elevator Speech, Evidence Plan, and Frame [3 pts]
	12/10	Individual Poster Presentation [20 pts]
UL	12/16	Research Design Due [35 pts]
		TOTAL POINTS: 126

## Late Policy

I expect that you will meet the deadlines as posted in the table of due dates. Many of the assignments are for in-class activity and there is no substitution for your participation. Everyone loses when you are not in class—really! That’s true every day, but especially on days when we work together. Therefore if you know of an unavoidable absence on an in-class activity day (as listed in the table of due dates) I must be notified of it a week in advance, with some documentation. If you are too ill to attend class, I will need documentation from UHS or your personal doctor. These rules are designed to be fair to all. If your absence is excused, we will delete the 3 points from your course requirements (ie the total semester points will be reduced by 3 points). Otherwise, without advance notice or a UHS slip, you will receive

a 0/3 for the day. That's a small penalty that may seem worth it to you on some days, so know that Diogo and I understand your decision even as we mark a zero for you, and there's no need to explain your choice to us.

I am able to offer some flexibility on two written assignments: the literature review and the workshop comparison. I'll accept them late with a 10% penalty. All work must be completed by 12/16.

If you have extraordinary external commitments (child care, work, student government, sports) please see me soon to talk about appropriate accommodations.

## Schedule of Classes

NB: (CT) = resource available on CTools; (eLib) = resource available electronically through the UM Library Catalog as article or electronic book; (google) = reading freely available on the internet

(9/8) Course Introduction

(9/10) The Art and Science of Political Science

- Easton, David. 1968. "Political Science," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. (google)
- Colomer, Josep. 2011. *The Science of Politics*, "Introduction." (CT)
- Stoker, Gerry and David Marsh, "Introduction," pp1-12, *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 3rd edition. (google)

(9/15) Finding Data and Conducting Research at the UM Library

Guest: Catherine Morse, Government Information, Law and Political Science Librarian

- NOTE: DUE 9/14, THE NIGHT BEFORE LECTURE. Upload three political science research questions as a CTools assignment. One sentence each. Try to connect them to some of the categories of research (subfield, paradigm, institutions vs behavior, problem domain, methodology). Don't stress too much about how brilliant the questions might be.

- If you own a laptop bring it to class today

(9/17) Argument Construction and Formulating Hypotheses

- Weston chs I, II, III
- Maoz, Zeev and Bruce Russett. 1993. “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–86.” *American Political Science Review* 87(3):624–38. (eLib)

(9/22) The Pitch

- Prepare a one-minute “pitch” of your research topic for an in-class exercise. Generate a clear research question, note why it is theoretically interesting and/or substantively important and identify the likely independent and dependent variables.

(9/24) Research Software Tools: Reference Managers, Poster Design, and Workflow Management

Guest: Melissa Gomis, Instructional Technology Librarian

- If you have a laptop, bring it to class.
- Weston ch IV

(9/29) Causality I

Guest Speaker: Diogo Ferrari

- Brady, Henry E.. 2008. “Causation and Explanation in Social Science.” *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. (eLib)
- Wand, Jonathan, Kenneth Shotts, Jasjeet Sekhon, Walter Mebane, Michael Herron, and Henry Brady. 2001. “The Butterfly Did It: The Aberrant Vote for Buchanan in Palm Beach County, Florida.” *American Political Science Review* 95(4):793–810. (eLib)

(10/1) Causality II: Avoiding Pitfalls

- Weston chs V & VI

(10/6) Reviewing the Literature, then Group work: Spot the Thesis and Abstract Construction

- Upload your annotated bibliography of at least 6 sources

(10/8) Conceptualization and Measurement

- Collier, Laporte, and Seawright. 2008. “Typologies: Forming Concepts and Creating Categorical Variables,” *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (eLib)
- Coppedge et al, 2011, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9(2):247–67. (google or eLib)
- Paxton, Pamela. 2000. “Women’s Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35(3):92–111. (eLib)

(10/13) Case Selection and the Comparative Method

- Lijphart, Arend. 1971. “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method.” *American Political Science Review* 65(3):682–93. (eLib)
- Geddes, Barbara. 1990. “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.” *Political Analysis* 2(1):131–150. (eLib)
- Gerring, John. 2008. “Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques.” *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (eLib)

(10/15) Peer Review of Literature Review Draft

- Bring two copies of your literature review to class for peer exchange

(10/20) NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

(10/22) Supporting an Argument with Quantitative Data

Guest Speaker: Diogo Ferrari

- Bickel et al. 1975. “Sex Bias in Graduate Admissions: Data from Berkeley.” *Science* 187(4175):398–404. (CTools)



- Freedman, David and Pisani, Robert. and Purves, Roger. 2007. *Statistics*. Ch1 and 2 (p 3-20). (CTools)
- Wright, Gerald C., Jr. 1976. “Linear Models for Evaluating Conditional Relationships.” *American Journal of Political Science* 20:349–373. (eLib)
- Literature Review due tonight at 10pm

(10/27) Supporting an Argument with Qualitative Evidence

Guest Speaker: Robert Mickey, Department of Political Science

- Mahoney 2010 (CTools)
- Mickey, Robert W. 2015. *Paths out of Dixie*, ch1. (CTools)

(10/29) Class Cancelled

(11/3) ELECTION DAY / Supporting an Argument with Logic

Guest Speaker: Lisa Disch, Department of Political Science

- Fearon, James D. 1999. “Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance,” in Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin, eds., *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (CTools)
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2009. “A ‘Selection’ Model of Political Representation.” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17(4):369–98. (CTools)

(11/5) Supporting the Argument with Agent-Based Modeling

Guest Speaker: Scott Page, Center for the Study of Complex Systems

- Page 2015 “What Sociologists Should Know about Complex Systems.” *Annual Review of Sociology*. (CTools)

(11/10) Discussion of Methodologies: What do they have in common? How are they different?

(11/12) NO CLASS: ATTEND EMERGING SCHOLARS CONFERENCE ON FRIDAY

(11/17) Constructing the Research Design / Poster Construction

- King, Keohane, and Verba 1994 ch1 (CTools)
- Weston ch IX (there are parallels between oral presentations and posters)
- Workshop Comparison Paper due at 10pm

(11/19) Work on Group Poster in Class

(11/24) Group Poster Presentations

(11/26) NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING DAY

(12/1) Putting a Frame on Your Work

- Weston ch VII, XIII
- Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 1996. “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation.” *American Political Science Review* 90(4):715–735. Focus on the beginning and end; skim pp. 719–26; we are most interested in their frame, not the model itself. (google or eLib)

(12/3) Supporting the Argument: Your Turn

- Bring two copies of your title, introduction, thesis statement, abstract, and plan to support your argument for peer evaluation. Be prepared to deliver your abstract as an “elevator speech” and to describe your evidence plan in response to a follow-up question. In your evidence plan, identify the specific claims that you would need to establish in your research paper and locate data that would help you to support your claim. Defend why these are the right data and how you address alternative hypotheses.

(12/8) Professional Ethics

- LaCour, Michael J. and Donald P. Green. 2014. RETRACTED. “When Contact Changes Minds: An Experiment on Support for Gay Equality.” *Science* 346:6215:1366–69. (eLib)

- Editorial Letter of Concern (linked from article site) (eLib)
- “Professors’ Research Project Stirs Outrage in Montana.” *New York Times*, October 28, 2014. (google or eLib)

(12/10) Poster Session of Your Research Designs

**Research Designs are due December 16, 2015, at 10pm.**