

PS2325: Research Design in Political Science

Department of Political Science – Western University, Fall 2024
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Course description

This course introduces students to basic concepts and methods of research in the social sciences and, in particular, in political science. Students will learn about how the scientific method of research can be applied to the study of human behaviour, adopting both qualitative or quantitative methods of analysis. In the first part of the course, students will learn about how to identify research questions and conduct literature reviews. In this same section, we will discuss questions related to research ethics and how such concerns can affect the kinds of questions one can ask and how other questions can be answered empirically. Next, we will discuss questions related to argumentation. These include defining clear concepts of interest and proposing strong arguments for building theories that will subsequently be evaluated with data. The following section covers how researchers go about choosing among methods of analysis and how cases are selected to adequately evaluate their research questions. Finally, the course will cover a series of commonly used qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and experiments.

Required course text

Brancati, D. 2018. *Social Scientific Research*. Sage. (hereafter Brancati)

Course objectives

- Explain the goals, subjects, and orientation of social science research; identify the steps in the scientific method;
- Present the ethical concerns surrounding the use of human subjects; detail the ethical issues regarding publication like transparency, credit stealing and others;
- Introduce criteria for identifying a good research topic; identify ways research can make theoretical and empirical contributions; suggest ways to find inspiration for research;
- Describe the purpose and content of a literature review; discuss how to summarize and synthesize research for a literature review;
- Define concepts and their importance to research; describe the steps involved in building effective concepts;
- Differentiate between deductive and inductive reasoning; define necessary, sufficient, and (neither) necessary and (nor) sufficient conditions; examine different directions through which explanatory factors influence outcomes; identify common mistakes in causal arguments;
- Describe the attributes of qualitative and quantitative research; define hypothesis building, hypothesis testing, causal inference, generalizability, and replicability;

- Develop an objectives-based typology of mixed methods research designs; compare and contrast each of the objectives presented in this typology, namely design, concatenation, gap-filling, triangulation, and interpretation;
- Discuss why and how the number of cases included in a study matters; define and describe random and non-random sampling methods; explain selection bias and the problems that it represents for research;
- Differentiate among types of interviews and interview modes; describe the strengths and weaknesses of interviews for theory building and theory testing;
- Discuss the utility of focus groups for hypothesis building and hypothesis testing;
- Identify different types of measures according to their response categories; describe the criteria used to evaluate measurement quality; define random and systematic measurement error and the problems each represents for research;
- Compare and contrast observational and non-observational data; provide criteria with which to evaluate data quality and present techniques for identifying high quality data;
- Identify the different types of surveys used in social science research; guide designing a survey questionnaires; identify types of survey modes and their appropriateness for certain respondents;
- Identify the different types of Experiments Used in social science research; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of experiments vis-à-vis other research methods; present the criteria commonly used to evaluate the quality of experiments;
- Define the key features of observational studies; present the advantages and disadvantages of observational studies vis-à-vis other research methods; discuss the the difficulty of causal inference in observational studies and the techniques available to address it.

Diversity & Inclusion Statement

Students from all backgrounds and perspectives should be well-served by this course, students' learning needs should be addressed, and the diversity that the students bring to this class should be viewed as a resource and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity, including (but not limited to) academic background, race, culture, religion, and socioeconomic status. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Diversity contributes to the diversification of ideas and perspectives and enriches every element of the community and this course.

Student assessment

Students will be assessed through 4 assignments (each worth 5% of the final grade), a midterm (30%) in-class **on October 29**, and a final exam (35%) **during the final exam period (time and day to be determined)**. Assignments will be posted on OWL Brightspace. No late assignments will be accepted.

Each class will have a **Pop Quiz** with multiple-choice questions about the week's content (worth 10% of the final grade). These questions will be part of your preparation for the exams, and some of them will also be part of them. Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken in the first few minutes of class. If you arrive late, you will be automatically marked as absent—it is then your responsibility to notify the TAs or instructor at the end of the lecture. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence, beyond which each additional unexcused absence will be penalized by 1%, up to a total of 5%.

Due dates for assignments

- #1: September 17, 11:55pm;
- #2: October 1, 11:55pm;
- #3: November 5, 11:55pm;
- #4: November 26, 11:55pm;

Topics and readings

Week #1 (September 10): Course Introduction

- Review of syllabus and class organization.
- ◇ Chapter 1 *What is Social Science Research?*

Week #2 (September 17): Research Ethics

- ◇ Chapter 2 *Research Ethics*

Week #3 (September 24): Research Questions and Literature reviews

- ◇ Chapter 3 *Identifying a Research Question*
- ◇ Chapter 4 *Conducting a Literature Review*

Week #4 (October 1): Argumentation

- ◇ Chapter 5 *Building Effective Concepts*
- ◇ Chapter 6 *Making Strong Arguments*

Week #5 (October 8): Method Selection and Mixed Methods Research

- ◇ Chapter 7 *Method Selection*
- ◇ Chapter 8 *Mixed Methods Research*

Week #6 (October 15): NO CLASS: Fall break reading week

Week #7 (October 22): Case Selection

- ◇ Chapter 9 *Case Selection*
- Q&A - Midterm Exam

Week #8 (October 29): In-class Midterm Exam

Week #9 (November 5): Interviews and Focus Groups

- ◇ Chapter 10 *Interviews*
- ◇ Chapter 11 *Focus Groups*

Week #10 (November 12): Quantitative Measures and Data

- ◇ Chapter 15 *Quantitative Measures*
- ◇ Chapter 16 *Quantitative Data*

Week #11 (November 19): Surveys

◇ Chapter 18 *Surveys*

Week #12 (November 26): Experiments

◇ Chapter 19 *Experiments*

Week #13 (December 3): Observational Studies

◇ Chapter 20 *Observational Studies*

Q&A - Final Exam

Academic Considerations

Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at <https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

Accessibility

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

University Policy on Cheating and Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism:

"Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence." (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

"All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)."

Multiple-choice tests/exams:

"Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating." Note: Information excerpted and quoted above are Senate regulations from the Handbook of Scholarship and Academic Policy. http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/index.html

Support Services

Please visit the Social Science Academic Counselling webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic-related matters: Academic Counselling - Western University (uwo.ca)

Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options on how to obtain help.

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at Gender-Based Violence and Survivor Support

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Please contact the course instructor if you require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Accessible Education at http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html if you have any questions regarding accommodations.

Learning-skills counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

Western University is committed to a thriving campus as we deliver our courses in the mixed model of both virtual and face-to-face formats. We encourage you to check out the Digital Student Experience website to manage your academics and well-being: <https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/>.

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.