**PSC/IR 501**

Research and Writing in Political Science

Spring 2020

2-4:40 PM Fridays

**Alexander Lee**

**Instructor:**

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Office: Harkness Hall 327

Office Hours: Fridays, 10:15-12:15

**Course Goals:**

This course is targeted at teaching graduate students how to develop ideas for conducting rigorous theoretical and empirical research, how to convey theory and finding effectively in writing, and the norms of the political science profession. Students will be asked to develop specific research proposals during the course. Topics include research design, academic writing and presentation.

**Grading:**

9 Class Assignments and Presentations x 10%⎯ 90%

Class Participation⎯ 10%

**Course Policies:**

Unexcused late work will be penalized a whole letter grade, and an additional letter grade for every additional 24 hours of lateness. Plagiarism or cheating will be treated seriously and reported to the Board of Academic Honesty. No other absences will be excused except by doctor’s note.

**Course Requirements:**

*Attendance and Reading:* Students will be graded on their attendance and participation in each week’s activities.

*Assignments:* Students are required to complete the assignments detailed for each week and present them in class. Assignments are due the midnight before class. Students doing methodological, philosophical or formal theoretic work should consult with the instructor about alternatives to certain of the assignments.

**January 17th: Question and Research Design Selection**

*Lecture:* How do we select suitable research questions? And how to we design empirical research in a way that will allow us to make reliable statements about cause and effect?

*Readings:*

Frey, Anderson. "Cash transfers, clientelism, and political enfranchisement: Evidence from Brazil." *Journal of Public Economics* 176 (2019): 1-17.

Lee, Alexander. “Who Becomes a Terrorist?: Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence.” *World Politics*, 2011, 63: 203-245.

Fey, Mark. "Stability and coordination in Duverger's law: A formal model of preelection polls and strategic voting." *American Political Science Review* 91.1 (1997): 135-147.

Signorino, Curtis S. "Strategic interaction and the statistical analysis of international conflict." *American Political Science Review* 93.2 (1999): 279-297.

*Resources:*

King, Gary. “Replication, Replication.” <https://gking.harvard.edu/files/gking/files/replication.pdf>

Angrist, Joshua and Jorn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics.* Princeton UP.

Daniel Little. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation.* Westview Press.

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry.* Princeton.

James Johnson. 2006. “Consequences of Positivism: A Pragmatist Assessment,” *Comparative Political Studies* 39:224-52.

**January 24th: Academic Writing**

*Assignment #2:* Students should submit before class 1) a comprehensive rewriting of the abstract and introduction of a paper published in the past year in the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, or *Journal of Politics*, along with a copy of the original paper. Students should also submit 2) a comprehensive rewriting of the abstract and introduction of one of the professor’s papers, to be circulated before class.

*Resources:*

Colomb, G. G., and J. M. Williams. *Style: The basics of clarity and grace.* Boston: Longman, 2012.

Cook, Claire Kehrwald. *Line by line: How to edit your own writing.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1985.

**January 31st: No Class, Student Meetings**

*Assignment #1:* Class will not meet this week. Students will make appointments for 40 minute blocs of time to meet with the instructor and discuss a list of six research ideas, which they are required to bring to the meeting. Of these ideas 1) At least one should focus on a question that has not previous be raised in political science, 2) At least one should suggest a new answer to a well-established problem or question, 3) at least one should focus on a data source (real or potential) that has not previously been analyzed, and 4) at least one should involve the independent variable being random or ignorable assigned. Students interested in formal theory and/or methods topics may be excused from the last two requirements if they bring ideas that promise to contribute to these areas. For their ideas, students should ideally have some idea of the question they will ask, a hypothesis or theory they believe sheds light on this question, empirical data they will use to test such a hypothesis, and the research design they would use, though not all of these elements are applicable to all projects, and students may still be hazy on one element or another.

**February 7th: Presentation of Research Questions**

*Assignment #3:* Students must circulate and informally present in class a memorandum (minimum length 800 words) describing one research idea. The proposal should describe in general terms the question or puzzle, the existing state of the literature on this question, the hypothesis or theory, the data to be used, the research design, and a brief discussion (based on existing cases) for why your theory might be correct.

**February 14th: Microfoundations and Mechanisms**

*Lecture:* How do we develop theories based on the decision-making of individual actors that can explain broad social phenomena?

*Readings:*

Lacina, Bethany. "How governments shape the risk of civil violence: India's federal reorganization, 1950–56." *American Journal of Political Science* 58.3 (2014): 720-738.

Paine, Jack. "Rethinking the conflict “resource curse”: how oil wealth prevents center-seeking civil wars." *International Organization* 70.4 (2016): 727-761.

Alexander, Dan, Christopher R. Berry, and William G. Howell. "Distributive politics and legislator ideology." *The Journal of Politics* 78.1 (2016): 214-231.

Helmke, Gretchen. *Courts under constraints: judges, generals, and presidents in Argentina.* Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 20-60.

*Resources:*

Thomas Schelling. 1978. *Micromotives and Macrobehavior.* Norton.

David Kreps. 1990. *Game Theory and Economic Modelling.* Oxford.

Geddes, Barbara. *Paradigms and sand castles: Theory building and research design in comparative politics.* University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro. 1994. *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory.* Yale.

**February 21st: Student Presentation of Microfoundations and Mechanisms**

*Assignment #4:* Student should develop (and summarize in a memo with a minimum length of 500 words) a clear statement about a theoretical process that is based on primitives. Memos should 1) describe the scope conditions of the theory, 2) describe the actors of the theory and the ways in which they interact with each other or nature, 3) describe any assumptions necessary about the motivations, constraints or interactions of the actors. The theoretical mechanism can be summarized using the setup for a formal model, a flow chart, or a set of linked axioms. Students planning to make purely methodological contributions should consult with the instructor about alternatives to this assignment.

**February 28th: Data**

*Lecture:* What makes empirical evidence compelling? How do we gather it? What are some forms of non-quantitative evidence gathering?

*Readings:*

Kroeger, Mary A. "Plagiarizing policy: Model legislation in state legislatures." Working Paper (2018).

Abramson, Scott F. "The economic origins of the territorial state." *International Organization* 71.1 (2017): 97-130.

Komisarchik, Mayya. “Electoral Protectionism: How Southern Counties Eliminated Elected Offices In Response to the Voting Rights Act.” Working Paper, 2018.

Helmke, Gretchen. *Courts under constraints: judges, generals, and presidents in Argentina.* Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 56-117

*Resources:*

Richard Fenno. 1986. “Observation, Context, and Sequence,” *American Political Science Review* 80:3-16.

Lisa Wedeen. 2010. “Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science,” *Annual Review of Political Science 13*:255–72.

Laitin, David. "Comparative politics: The state of the subdiscipline." (2000).

Phillip Schrodt. 2014. “The Seven Deadly Sins of Contemporary Quantitative Political Analysis,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 287–300.

<https://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS293/articles/mrperestroika.pdf>

<https://lists.h-net.org/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-polmeth&month=0207&week=b&msg=CdRdCYrvPCtJ0pCgIlWsGQ>

**March 6th: Presentation of Evidence**

*Assignment #5:* Students must complete two assignments and informally present them in class. Firstly, they must BOTH download a publicly available dataset and create a crosstabulation and a graph (scatterplot or a distributional graph). The table and graph must not simple summarize the data, but must be clearly be related to testing the plausibility of the theory they have chosen. Secondly, student must EITHER 1) interview a political actor or non-academic expert who may have knowledge related to the research question or 2) read a book (minimum length 300 pages) written by a political actor, produced by a political institution, or written by a historian. In a memo (minimum length 500 words) they must summarize the book or interview and discuss how the evidence from if supports, modifies, or does not support they theory.

**March 20th: Structuring Papers**

*Assignment #6:* Students must present in class the structure of two papers published in the past year in the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, or *Journal of Politics*, without describing the specific findings or arguments made.

*Resources:*

King, Gary. “Publication, Publication.” <https://gking.harvard.edu/files/gking/files/paperspub.pdf>

Weingast, Barry. “Caltech Rules for Writing Papers.” <https://web.stanford.edu/group/mcnollgast/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/CALTECH.RUL_..pdf>

Imai, Koskuke. “Final Project.” <https://imai.fas.harvard.edu/teaching/files/HowToPaper.pdf>

Chaubey, Varanya. "The Little Book of Research Writing." (2017).

Paine, Jack. “Writing Advice for Political Science Students: Version 2.0” (2018) <http://nebula.wsimg.com/b9a22e95861ecee468222fe9199535c3?AccessKeyId=FD7670AEAE23BB8C3DAE&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

**March 27th: Writing Data and Results**

*Assignment #7:* Students must produce and present an original regression table testing a hypothesis (which should ideally be related to their topic, but is not required to be) and then produce text (minimum length 250 words) describing this table. Students planning to make purely methodological or theoretical contributions should consult with the instructor about alternatives to this assignment.

**April 3rd : The Academic Publication Process and Career Structure**

*Lecture:* Academic journals, academic books, the review process, the job market, conferences, tips for academic presentations, related topics. Readings from the instructor’s work and reviews will be distributed before class

**April 17th: Writing Theory and Literature Reviews**

*Assignment #8:* Students must write and informally present a substantial portion of the “Theory Section” and “Literature” sections of a potential paper on their topic of interest. Readers should clearly understand the theory, how it arises from primitives, the context in which it will be tested, and why that context is inappropriate

**April 24th Writing Abstracts and Introductions**

*Assignment #9:* Students must write and informally present an abstract and introduction to a research paper on their topic of interest. Student may make educated guesses about the solutions to models or the results of fieldwork or quantitative analyses. These hypothetical sections must be written in italics.