

Spring 2014 | Thursdays, 2:00-4:40pm | Classroom: LeChase Hall 182

PSC 208W: Undergraduate Research Seminar

Matthew Blackwell

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General Information

This course is about how to write a social science research paper. Our goal will be to prepare you to write a small-scale individual or joint research project. In so doing we will discuss how to develop an open-ended question and how to answer that question using systematic evidence. We will cover such topics as framing an original research question, finding data, undertaking rigorous analysis, writing in a social science style, and using the appropriate reference style.

The best way to learn how to write a social science paper is to write one. While you develop that project, we will read and analyze good examples of research from political science and other social sciences. We will see different methods and different data for answering political questions and learn the advantages and disadvantages of each. We will hone in on the intuition behind these approaches, leaving the more technical aspects aside. The goal will be to give you an understanding of how and when methods are appropriate and when they are inappropriate for a given research question and set of data. Our readings do not constitute a political science “canon” nor are they

comprehensive in methodological or substantive scope. Instead we will treat them as case studies in research design and draw out their lessons about quantitative evidence, statistical techniques, and valid social science inference.

Who should and should not take this class?

This class requires you to complete an original research project on a topic of your choosing. Thus, you should be interested in doing research in political science, broadly defined. The final research project is a significant undertaking and will require a good deal of your attention, especially in the second half of term. Thus, if you choose to take the class, you make sure that this fits with your schedule. One of the prerequisites for this course is a course in quantitative analysis—statistics, data analysis, or the like. It's important to have some knowledge of these topics because both your research and the research we will study will often rely quantitative arguments.

Readings

The readings will all be on the course website, except as explicitly noted in class.

Grading

- **30% Short review papers** - These will be a series of short (2-3 page) papers written in response to the reading in advance of class meetings. These will mainly occur in the first half of term.
- **20% Class participation** - Your participation grade will depend on your attendance, your substantive contributions to the discussion, and your presentations. Note that speaking in class doesn't necessarily mean you have contributed to the discussion.
- **50% Final Paper** - Your overall goal for the course and the bulk of the work in the second half of the term. This will be roughly a 15 page social science paper that identifies an empirical or theoretical puzzle in the literature, lays out a research design to solve this puzzle, and brings data analysis to bear on the question. You will be graded on how your work draws on but also extends previous research, the originality of your hypotheses, the appropriateness of the data you collect (or use), the skill with which you analyze the data, and all aspects of the writing.

Late Policy

If you turn in an assignment late, you will receive a 10% deduction in the grade on that assignment for every 24 hour period late. For example, if an assignment is due at

2pm on Tuesday and you submit your assignment at 5pm on Tuesday, we will deduct 10 percentage points off your grade. If you submit at 3pm on Wednesday, that will be considered two days late and you will receive 20 percentage points off your grade. If you submit the homework more than 72 hours (3 days) after the due date, you will receive no credit. Exceptions to this policy must be made in advance and will be subject to the restrictions below.

Paper submission

All papers you submit, whether the short reviews or the final paper **should be PDFs**. They **should not** be Word documents, plain text files, Open-Office documents, Google Drive documents, rich text files, Lotus files, WordPerfect files, HTML files, or plain text emails. They should be PDFs. Work in whatever word processing or typesetting program you like, but there's no need to expose that workflow to the consumer of your written word. When you go to submit, export or print your file to PDF and submit that file.

Collaboration

You may work on the final papers either individually or as a joint endeavor. No matter what, you will be expected to complete all aspects of the project. Joint projects will assign the same grade to all members of the group equally. Unless otherwise indicated, all other assignments will be individual assignments.

Excused absences and assignments

All assignments and attendance is mandatory. Exceptions will only be granted under the following circumstances: (1) death in the family, (2) participation in a University-sponsored academic or sporting event, (3) unforeseen medical emergency. In the case of (1) and (2), you must inform me within 24 hours of the assignment or class that you will miss it. In some cases, I may require supporting documentation out of fairness to other students.

Schedule

January 16 - Journalism versus Science

Topics How does (social) scientific research differ from journalism? Theories, hypotheses, and empirical implications.

Readings

- Thomas Friedman. 2006. “The First Law of Petropolitics.” *Foreign Policy* (April)
- Michael L Ross. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53, no. 03 (April): 325–361

January 23 - The Quality of Evidence

Assignment Write a 2 to 3 page reaction paper that critically evaluates to the debate in these three papers over the quality of the empirical evidence that each side brings to bear. State the hypothesis under investigation and summarize the methods and data used to test the hypothesis. In addition, write one source of additional data or an additional empirical implication of the theory that might adjudicate between the viewpoints. Additional issues that you might think about are: how does missing data play a role in the debate? How does endogeneity pose a threat to inference in this case? Which (if either) argument do you find persuasive about mitigating this endogeneity?

Readings

- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2001. “**The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation.**” *The American Economic Review* 91, no. 5 (December): 1369–1401
- David Y Albouy. 2012. “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation: Comment.” *The American Economic Review* 102, no. 6 (October): 3059–3076
- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A Robinson. 2012. “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation: Reply.” *The American Economic Review* 102, no. 6 (October): 3077–3110

January 30 - Experiments and Thinking about Causality

Assignment Write roughly 1 page on each of the following papers that critically evaluates its research question, hypotheses, and/or data analysis. Possible topics include whether you think the question is an important one, whether the (quasi-)experimental

nature of the study was important to its persuasiveness, or whether there is an important distinction between experiments and so-called “natural” experiments.

Readings

- Alan S Gerber, Donald P. Green, and Christopher W Larimer. 2008. “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment.” *The American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (February): 33–48
- Susan D Hyde. 2007. “The Observer Effect in International Politics: Evidence from a Natural Experiment.” *World Politics* 60, no. 01 (October): 37–63
- Jason Lyall. 2010. “Are coethnics more effective counterinsurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War.” *American Political Science Review* 104 (01): 1–20

February 6 - Panel versus Cross-Sectional Data

Assignment Write roughly 1 page on each of the following papers that critically evaluates its research question, hypotheses, and/or data analysis. For each paper, summarize the hypothesis, data collected, methods used, and results obtained. Possible additional topics include whether you think the question is an important one, whether the additional over-time variation in the data was crucial for inference, or additional hypotheses the authors might have tested with their data.

Readings

- Jonathan McDonald Ladd and Gabriel S Lenz. 2009. “Exploiting a rare communication shift to document the persuasive power of the news media.” *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 394–410
- Ebonya Washington. 2006. “How black candidates affect voter turnout.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121, no. 3 (August): 973–998
- Sarah F Anzia and Christopher R Berry. 2011. “The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (July): 478–493

February 13 - Project discussion

Assignment Write a short description of at least two possible projects that you (alone or as a group) might undertake. Circulate early to the entire class (as per instructions). Read others’ proposals as instructed. After class, hand in the project descriptions.

February 20 - Formal theory

Assignment Write a 2 to 3 page paper in response to one of the three assigned pieces. What are the model's key assumptions? In particular, what features of reality does it include, and how does it relate those features to one another? What features of reality does it exclude? Why might that be so? If you choose to write about a paper with empirical tests (Schultz and Canes-Wrone et al), are you compelled by the mapping between theory and data? If you choose to write about Fearon, would you be more persuaded by the theory if it had some empirical test associated with it? Why or why not?

Readings

- James D. Fearon. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (July): 379-414
- Kenneth A Schultz. 1999. "Do Democratic Institutions Constrain or Inform? Contrasting Two Institutional Perspectives on Democracy and War." *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (April): 233-266
- Brandice Canes-Wrone, Michael C Herron, and Kenneth W Shotts. 2001. "Leadership and pandering: A theory of executive policymaking." *American Journal of Political Science*:532-550

February 27 - Historical, textual, and other sources of data

Topics Getting started on a project.

Assignment Read the following papers and be ready to discuss them.

Readings

- Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. 2013. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 02 (May): 326-343
- Nathan Nunn and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa." *The American Economic Review* 101, no. 7 (December): 3221-3252
- Melissa Dell. 2010. "The Persistent Effects of Peru's Mining Mita." *Econometrica* 78 (6): 1863-1903

March 6 - Summarize research

Topics On-going discussion of your projects.

Assignment Hand in a brief (3/4 to 1 page) statement about the tentative plans for your “long” research project. Insofar as possible, this should identify: a) the topic of your research; b) the specific data you intend to work with; c) how you will begin the analysis. With respect to (c), be as specific as possible; saying “I will look for patterns in the data” or “I’ll look for relevant literature” isn’t satisfactory.

March 20 - Genetics and Politics

Assignment Read the following article and be prepared to discuss it in class.

- John R Alford, Carolyn L Funk, and John R Hibbing. 2005. “Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?” *The American Political Science Review* 99, no. 2 (May): 153–167

March 27 - Literature review

Topics On-going discussion of your projects; preparing an outline.

Assignment Hand in a literature review of your work related to your topic. This should be 2-3 pages plus a list of references.

April 3 - Outline

Assignment Hand in an outline of your final paper.

April 10 - Partial Draft

Topics Editing; rewriting.

Assignment Hand in a first draft of your final paper. This should be no more than 1-2 pages.

April 17 - Tables/figures

Topics Tables and figures.

Assignment Prepare one substantive (that is, not a review of the text or literature) figure or table from your paper to go over in class. We will critique both content and style.

April 24 - Second partial draft

Topics Final copies and presentations.

Assignment Prepare one substantive (that is, not a review of the text or literature) figure or table from your paper to go over in class. We will critique both content and style.

May 1 - Presentation

Assignment Class presentations; hand in your final paper. Note that this is a day after classes end and is in lieu of a final exam.