

PSC 562: Empirical Research Practicum

Prof. Bethany Lacina
Mondays, 12:30-3:15pm
Harkness 113

This course presents basic issues in empirical research in the social sciences. Classes will alternate between discussion of readings on approaches to empirical research and applied weeks, where students will present successive iterations of their own research in-progress. The research design topics I plan to cover will be generating observable implications of theory; case selection; collection of large-n observational and archival data; narrative case study; experiments and natural experiments; elite interviews; and participant observation. This list may be modified in light of students' research interests.

Instructor

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 10-12

Course Requirements

1. Students must attend every class. A student who misses class must get in touch with me within 24 hours of the start of the missed class period and then complete a make-up assignment. Students who do not follow this procedure will have an unexcused absence.
2. Reading for the week must be completed by all students before class.
3. Additional readings are listed in some weeks under the heading "Reading for the comprehensive exam." If a student plans to use this course in their comprehensive exams, this additional reading will need to be completed before the examination date.
4. Weekly assignments are noted below. All weekly assignments are due by noon the day before class. There will be a course Dropbox folder where you can post your assignments and access other students' assignments. Late work will be marked down by one-third of a letter grade per 24 hour period of delay.
5. You must read other students' assignments in advance of class and be prepared to offer comments and suggestions.
6. A research prospectus that sums up the work done throughout the semester on your research question will be due December 20th. The prospectus should update previous iterations of your project and respond to other students' questions and criticisms. The prospectus will be

graded on the quality of thinking that went into the project, rather than the strength of the empirical results.

Class schedule

August 31: Introduction to the course

September 7: Labor Day, no class

September 14: Research questions

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Choose a research question from a literature within political science that you think is inadequately explained by existing theories. You should have an intuition on how to improve the state of this literature and believe there are (or it is possible to create) quantitative data with which to explore the existing theory/theories and your intuition for improvement.

You will be asked to make a brief in-class presentation of this research question. A written outline should be distributed to the group by noon the day before the class meeting to allow all members of the group to prepare comments, questions and suggestions on each others' proposals.

September 21: Observable implications and case selection

Reading for the week:

Geddes, Barbara. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis* 2 (1). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23317768>

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press. Pages 3–33. <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s5458.pdf>

Shapiro, Ian. 2002. "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It." *Political Theory* 30 (4). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3072623>

Snyder, Richard. 2001. "Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36 (1). <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF02687586>

To prepare for class:

In anticipation of class, consider the following questions. You do not need to hand in any written work before class.

- What is the universe of cases to which your theory is applicable?
- Write down as many observable implications of your theory as you can. Think about multiple levels of analysis (e.g., individuals, organizations, governments, countries, etc.) to increase the number of implications you can write down.

- Which observable implications are consistent with your theory but not with other theories relevant to your problem?
- Which case(s) could you use to study your theory in a large-n research design?
- What case(s) would lend themselves to narrative exploration of your theory?

Reading for the comprehensive exam:

Clarke, Kevin A. and David M. Primo. *A Model Discipline*. Oxford University Press.

Collier, David and James Mahoney. 1996. "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research." *World Politics* 49 (1). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25053989>

Johnson, James. 2006. "Consequences of Positivism." *Comparative Political Studies* 39(2). <http://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005282982>

September 28: Narratives

Collier, David D. 2011. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44 (4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429>

Elster, Jon et al. 2000. "Review: Rational Choice History: A Case of Excessive Ambition" (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2585842>) and "The Analytical Narrative Project" (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2585843>). *American Political Science Review* 94 (3).

Ragin, Charles. 1997. "Turning the Tables: How Case-Oriented Research Challenges Variable-Oriented Research." *Comparative Social Research* 16.

Kiser, Edgar. 1996. "The Revival of Narrative in Historical Sociology: What Rational Choice Theory Can Contribute." *Politics & Society* 24 (3). <https://www.dropbox.com/s/8fznz8z5yz644mm/Politics%20Society-1996-KISER-249-71.pdf?dl=0>

Reading for the comprehensive exam:

Abell, Peter. 2004. "Narrative Explanation: An Alternative to Variable-Centered Explanation?" *Annual Review of Sociology*.

Stanley Lieberson. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." *Social Forces* 70 (2). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i344346>

Tilly, Charles. 2001. "Mechanisms in Political Processes." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

Bates, Robert H., Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, eds. 1998. *Analytic Narratives*. Princeton University Press.

Fearon, James. 1991. "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science." *World Politics* 43 (2). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010470>

October 5: Fall break, no class

October 12: Linking small-n and large-n observational research

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Read about a particular case (or a small set of cases) that instantiate(s) your theory. You should rely on books, articles, archives, newspapers, biographies, etc. Write a five-page memo on how the case(s) is (are) anomalous for reigning theory and suggest what variables might need to be added or substituted to do better than reigning theory. Again, papers should be distributed to the group by noon on the day before class to allow all members of the group to prepare comments, questions and suggestions on each others' proposals.

Reading for the week:

Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95 (3). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3118231>

Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 2008. "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods." *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/zce41j98y2r81nq/fearonlaitin.pdf?dl=0>

Herrera, Yoshiko M. and Devesh Kapur. 2007. "Improving Data Quality: Actors, Incentives, and Capabilities." *Political Analysis* 15 (4). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i25791900>

Lieberman, Evan S. 2005. "Nested analysis as a mixed-method strategy for comparative research." *American Political Science Review* 99 (3). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038950>

October 19: Large-n observational research

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Search out a data set that would produce some statistical test of your theory or of an observable implication of your theory. Explore descriptive statistics to gauge the plausibility of your amendment to the reigning theory. Focus on statistical and graphical descriptions of the dependent variable and principal independent variables and on analysis of basic correlations. Presentation of regression results is optional, and will only be allowed once these basic descriptive statistics have been fully explored. Prepare a 15-minute presentation describing your statistical exploits to give in seminar. Circulate an outline of your statistical work, including all tables and graphs from your presentation, by noon the day before class.

October 26: Experiments and natural experiments

Angrist, Joshua D. and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2009. *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Chapters 2, 4, and 6. Available as an e-book through the U of R library catalog.

Dunning, Thad. 2008. "Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments." *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2). <http://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907306470>

Goldthorpe, John H. 2001. "Causation, Statistics, and Sociology." *European Sociological Review* 17 (1). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/522622>

November 2: Experiments and natural experiments II

Reading for the week:

Gaines, Brian J. and James H. Kuklinski. 2007. "The Logic of the Survey Experiment Reexamined." *Political Analysis* 23 (3). <http://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpi008>

Green, Donald and Alan Gerber. 2002. "Reclaiming the Experimental Tradition in Political Science" in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner (eds.), *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*. Norton.

Harrison, Glenn W. and John A. List. 2004. "Field Experiments." *Journal of Economic Literature* 42 (4). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594915>

Wantchekon, Leonard. 2003. "Clientilism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin." *World Politics* 55 (3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/wp.2003.0018>

November 9: Proposals for experimental or quasi-experimental research designs

Write a five-page research memo describing:

- A lab, survey, or field experiment that could be used to test some aspect of your theory or the mechanisms underlying it.
- Ideas for what might constitute a natural experiment that would test your theory or mechanisms underlying it. Your explanation will identify a "treatment," a (hypothetical or real) circumstance that might approximate random assignment to that treatment, and explain what outcome you would measure and what kinds of results would be evidence for and against your theory.

November 16: Observational field methods

Reading for the week:

Aberbach, Joel A., James D. Chesney, and Bert A. Rockman. 1975. "Exploring Elite Political Attitudes: Some Methodological Lessons." *Political Methodology* 2 (1). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25791403>

Kawulich, Barbara B. 2005. "Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6 (2). <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>

Whyte, William Foot. 1982. "Interviewing in Field Research," in Robert G. Burgess (ed.), *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*. George Allen and Unwin.

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2009. "Field Methods" in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford. Available as an e-book through the U of R library catalog.

Reading for the comprehensive exam:

Fenno, Richard F. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Little Brown. Pp. 249–293.

Laitin, David D. 1986. *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Change among the Yoruba*. University of Chicago Press. Pp. 185–206.

Rivera, Sharon Werning, Polina Kozyreva, and Eduard Sarovskii. 2002. “Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35 (4).

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2003. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1–87, 193–256.

November 23: Thanksgiving break, no class

November 30: Fieldwork proposals

Assignment (due at noon the day before class):

Develop a three-page research strategy employing field methods to gather data to test the implications of your theory. Your written research strategy should include three components: (1) a list of the “types” of respondents (and, if possible, specific respondents) you will need to observe or speak with and; (2) a list of questions that you will need to have answered, either from behavioral observation, surveys, interviews, etc. and; (3) a discussion of how this data will help you to accept or reject competing theories.

December 1: Interpretative methods

Reading for the week:

Epstein, Arnold. 1958. *Politics in an Urban African Community*. Manchester University Press. Pp. 48-156, 224-240.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.

Green, Abigail. 2004. *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1–21, 97–188. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/3tur0k5hcyh2qw8/Green.Fatherlands.pdf?dl=0>

Ventresca, Marc J. and John W. Mohr. 2001. “Archival research methods,” in Joel A. C. Baum (ed.), *Companion to Organizations*. Blackwell. http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/mohr/classes/soc4/summer_08/pages/Resources/Readings/Ventresca%20&%20Mohr.pdf

December 8: Final presentations

Prepare a 15-minute presentation of your research question, preliminary findings, and research strategy for the future. This presentation should update previous iterations of your project, responding to other students’ questions and criticisms. You do not need to circulate any material in advance of class.

December 20: Final research prospectus due by 5pm