**PSC 8108: Craft of Political Inquiry**

Spring 2024 Syllabus

**Instructor:** Jeffrey Ding **Location:** GELM B02

**Meeting Times:** W 12:45-3:15PM **Office Hours:** Th 3:00-5:00pm (Monroe Hall 408)

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**Course Overview**

This seminar introduces graduate students to critical issues and contemporary debates in the logic and design of empirical social science. The course aims to help you recognize and navigate some of the varied modes—quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive—of empirical research, and the at times contentious exchanges about them. By the end of this course, you should become both: 1) a more methodologically acute consumer of empirical social science, and 2) a more sophisticated potential producer of research—i.e. better able to clearly formulate a research question, develop a strategy to answer it, and explain your research choices and results to academic audiences with varied methodological orientations.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of the course, students will be equipped to:

* Explain the concepts and positions within the philosophy of science that have become part of the conversation of political scientists.
* Distinguish alternative views of causation, explanation, and inference and identify their differential implications for research styles and standards.
* Apply research design standards to evaluate the research of others and to inform the choices made in your own research.

**Anticipated Course Workload**

This 15-week course includes 2.5 hours of weekly instruction (class meetings) and an average of 5 hours per week of outside work in preparing for class and completing assignments.

**Grading & Assignments**

Grades will be based on weekly attendance and participation (20%), research skills assignments (50%), and a final research design and presentation (30%).

* **Classroom participation** (20%): Just like engaging in water balloon fights, thinking through complex issues is most productive and fun when done in the company of others. Students are expected to demonstrate their engagement with the readings by actively listening and contributing to in-class discussions.
* **Research skills assignments** (50%): A central goal of this class is for you to begin to develop the research skills that you will need to write a high-quality dissertation. You will therefore complete short “research skills” assignments throughout the semester. Each assignment is designed for you to practice different elements of the research process, and to gain experience thinking through various aspects of different approaches to research. They will also serve to structure in-class discussion in some weeks. \**On the week they are due, assignments must be submitted to Blackboard by Tuesday 11:59PM Eastern Time.*
* **Final research design and presentation** (30%): Building from your work on the research skills assignments, you will write a final research design of roughly 10-15 pages (about the length of an NSF dissertation proposal). As part of a process in which you get feedback from peers and the instructor, you will prepare a 10 min. presentation to the class, with slides, that details your design. *\*The final research design is due May 5, 11:59PM Eastern Time.*

*Grading scale:* All assignments are graded on a 100-point scale. I then calculate your final grade based on the weighting scheme. After rounding final grades up to the nearest whole number, I use the conventional grading scale:

A = 94-100; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86, and so on.

**Course Schedule (abbreviated)**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Class Date** | **Weekly Topics** |
| 1 | 1/17 | Introduction and course overview |
| 2 | 1/24 | Developing a research agenda and asking research questions  |
| 3 | 1/31 | Theory, explanations, and hypotheses |
| 4 | 2/7 | Concepts |
| 5 | 2/14 | Measurement |
| 6 | 2/21 | Causation and Causal Arguments |
| 7 | 2/28 | Case Selection and Selection Bias  |
| 8 | 3/6 | Experiments and “Natural” Experiments |
|  3/11-3/16 SPRING BREAK |
| 9 | 3/20 | Large N, Non-Experimental Research |
| 10 | 3/27 | Case Studies and Causal Process Tracing |
| 11 | 4/3 | Mixed Methods |
| 12 | 4/10 | Ethnography, interpretation, and fieldwork |
| 13 | 4/17 | Topic of class choice on professionalization + presentations |
| 14 | 4/24 | Topic of class choice on professionalization + presentations |
| Finals |  | **Submit final research design by May 5** |

**Full Course Schedule & Readings**

We will read significant portions of 3 books. KKV and Geddes are available for free online through the GWU library. The Gerring book will need to be purchased. I will post the Gerring chapter for January 24 on Blackboard.

* Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A unified framework* (2nd edition). New York: Cambridge University Press. [need to purchase] (one copy available in course reserves)
* King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba (KKV). 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [available online]
* Geddes, Barbara. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003 [available online]

**Week 1 (1/17): Introduction and course overview**

* Keohane, Robert O. 2009. “Political Science as a Vocation.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42, no. 2 359-63.
* Brady, Henry. 2004. “Two Paths to a Science of Politics: Introduction to the Symposium.” *Perspectives on Politics* 2(2): 295-300. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/86A1C46EBA0EFA723C508DB2E47FB667/S1537592704040162a.pdf/introduction.pdf>

**Week 2 (1/24): Developing a Research Agenda and Asking Research Questions**

\*Assignment 1 due

* Gerring, “Beginnings”
* KKV, “The Science in Social Science”, read up to page 19
* Geddes, “Big Questions, Little Answers: How the Questions You Choose Affect the Answer You Get.”
* Fred Eidlin. 2011. “The Method of Problems versus the Method of Topics,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*.

**Week 3 (1/31): Theory, Explanations, and Hypotheses**

\*Assignment 2 due

* Gerring, “Arguments”
* KKV, section 1.2.2
* Popper, Karl. 1953. “Science: Conjectures and Refutations.” Chap. 1 of *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books)

*Examples for discussion*

* Fearon, James D and David Laitin. 1996. “Explaining Interethnic Competition.” *American Political Science Review* 90(4): 715-735.
* Thomas, Jakana L and Kanisha D Bond. 2015. “Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations.” *American Political Science Review* 109(3): 488-506.

**Week 4 (2/7): Concepts**

\*Assignment 3 due

* Gerring, Chapters 5 and 6
* Gary Goertz. 2006. *Social Science Concepts,* Chapter 2 [available on blackboard site’s electronic reserves]
* Sartori, Giovanni. “Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 64:4 (1970): 1033-1053.

*Applications for discussion*

* Alisha Holland. “Forbearance,” *American Political Science Review* (2016) 110(2): 232-246.
* Robert Putnam et al., “Explaining Institutional Success: The Case of Italian Regional Government,” *American Political Science Review* (March 1983), pp. 55-74.

**Week 5 (2/14): Measurement**

\*Assignment 4 due

* Gerring, Chapter 7
* Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research.” *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3: 529-46

*Application to Measurement of Democracy*

* Lindberg et al. 2014. “VDEM: A New Way to Measure Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy.*
* Alvarez et al. 1996. “Classifying Political Regimes.” Studies in Comparative International Development 31 (2): 3–36
* Pamela Paxton. 2000. “Women’s Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization.” Studies in Comparative International Development. 35 (3): 92–111
* Shawn Treier and Simon Jackman. 2008. “Democracy as a Latent Variable.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 201–217

**Week 6 (2/21): Causation and Causal Arguments**

* Gerring, Chapters 8 and 9
* KKV, “Causality and Causal Inference”
* Brady, Henry. 2008. “Causation and Explanation in Social Science.” In David Collier, David Brady and Janet Box-Steffensmeier, eds. The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology. New York: Oxford University Press: ch. 10.
* Gerring, John. 2007. “The Mechanismic Worldview: Thinking Inside the Box.” *British Journal of Political Science* 37: 1-19.
* James D. Fearon. 1991. “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science.” World Politics 43 (2): 169–195

**Week 7 (2/28): Case Selection and Selection Bias**

\*Assignment 5 due

* Geddes “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias and Related Issues”
* KKV, “Determining What to Observe”
* Collier, David, James Mahoney, and Jason Seawright. “Claiming too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias.” Chap. 6 from *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 1st ed. [available online]
* Seawright, Jason and John Gerring. “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” Political Research Quarterly 61:2 (2008): 294- 308.

*Applied examples for discussion*

* Lewis, Janet, 2017. “How Does Ethnic Rebellion Start?”, *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (10): 1420-1450. \*GUEST SPEAKER.
* Achen, Christopher H. and Duncan Snidal. 1989. Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies. *World Politics* 41(2): 143‐169. *\*Focus on p. 160-167; skim rest.*

**Week 8 (3/6): Experiments and “Natural” Experiments**

* Gerring, Chapter 10
* Thad Dunning. 2008. “Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments.” Political Research Quarterly 61 (2): 282–293

*Applications*

* Goldfein, Michael A., Michael F. Joseph, and Roseanne W. McManus. 2022. “The Domestic Source of International Reputation,” *American Political Science Review* [Joseph is a GW political science PhD]
* Dube, Arindrajit, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar García-Ponce. “Cross-border spillover: US gun laws and violence in Mexico.” *American Political Science Review* (2013): 397-417.
* David Szakonyi, “Businesspeople in Elected Office: Identifying Private Returns from Firm-Level Returns,” *American Political Science Review*.

**Spring Break (3/11-3/16)**

**Week 9 (3/20): Large N, Non-Experimental Research**

\*Assignment 6 due

* Gerring, Chapter 11
* Susan C. Stokes. 2014. “A Defense of Observational Research.” Chap. 2 in Field Experiments and Their Critics: Essays on the Uses and Abuses of Experimentation in the Social Sciences, edited by Dawn Langan Teele New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

*Applications*

* Matthew Fuhrmann and Yonatan Lupu. 2016. “Do Arms Control Treaties Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 60, Issue 3, Pages 530–539
* de Benedictis-Kessner, Justin, and Michael Hankinson. “Concentrated burdens: How self-interest and partisanship shape opinion on opioid treatment policy.” *American Political Science Review* 113.4 (2019): 1078-1084. \*Hankinson GUEST SPEAKER
* Bergquist, Parrish, and Christopher Warshaw. “Does global warming increase public concern about climate change?.” *The Journal of Politics* 81.2 (2019): 686-691.

**Week 11 (3/27): Mixed Methods**

* Gerring, Chapter 13 and 14
* Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil. 2012. “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research.” Perspectives on Politics 10 (4): 935–953
* Scott Gelbach. 2015. “The Fallacy of Multiple Methods.” CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association. <https://scottgehlbach.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/>.

*Applications*

* Cooperman, Alicia Dailey. 2023. “Bloc Voting for Electoral Accountability.” *American Political Science Review*. \***Guest speaker**
* Elizabeth Levy Paluck and Donald Green. 2009. “Deference, Dissent, and Dispute Resolution: An Experimental Intervention Using Mass Media to Change Norms and Behavior in Rwanda. *American Political Science Review*.

**Week 10 (4/3): Case Studies and Causal Process Tracing**

* Mahoney, James. 2010. “After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research.” *World Politics* 62, no. 1: 120-47.
* Goertz, Gary and Jack S. Levy. 2007. “Causal Explanation, Necessary Conditions, and Case Studies.” Chap. 2 in Goertz and Levy, eds. *Explaining War and Peace: Case Studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals* (New York: Routledge)
* Mahoney, James, Erin Kimball and Kendra L. Koivu. 2009. “The Logic of Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences.” *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 1: 114-46.
* Collier, David. “Understanding Process Tracing.” PS: Political Science and Politics 44:4 (2011): 823-30.

*Applications*

* Danielle Gilbert. 2022. The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War: Evidence from Colombia,” *American Political Science Review*.[GW political science PhD]
* Evers, M. M. (2023). Discovering the prize: information, lobbying, and the origins of US–Saudi security relations. *European Journal of International Relations*. [GW political science PhD]

**Week 12 (4/10): Ethnography, Interpretation, and Fieldwork**

\*Assignment 7 due

* Lisa Wedeen, 2010. “Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2010): 255–72. [https://web.archive.org/web/20170809025630id\_/http://www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/47930150/Wedeen\_2010.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20170809025630id_/http%3A//www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/47930150/Wedeen_2010.pdf)
* Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2009. “Field Research.” In The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics, edited by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford University Press. <https://www.mgdc-chararisharief.com/elearn/The%20Oxford%20Handbook%20of%20Comparative%20Politics-1stSem.pdf>
* Lee Ann Fujii. 2015. “Five Stories of Accidental Ethnography: Turning Unplanned Moments in the Field into Data.” Qualitative Research 15 (4): 525–539 [GW political science PhD]

*Applications*

* Katherine Cramer Walsh. 2012. “Putting Inequality in its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective,” *American Political Science Review* 106 (3): 517-32.
* Jangai Jap [GW political science PhD]. 2024. *Comparative Political Studies*. “Can Encounters with the State Improve Minority-State Relations?” <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00104140231223746>

**Week 13 (4/17): TBD Topic on Professionalization + Presentations**

Will discuss potential options for this week as a group

**Week 14 (4/24): TBD Topic on Professionalization + Presentations**

Will discuss potential options for this week as a group

\*Reminder: Final research design due May 5, at 11:59PM Eastern Time.

**Additional Course Policies**

**Attendance and Late Submissions:** Being 15 minutes or more late to a class or section counts as an absence. You get one free absence – no questions asked. After that, if an absence is excused, students must make up any work from that class. Students who anticipate persistent challenges to participating in class or submitting work on time should share this with the course instructor as soon as possible. Late submissions are docked 5% for each day late. All submissions go through the Blackboard site.

**Plagiarism is a serious offense.** Students who plagiarize will receive an F on the assignment and be referred to the Academic Integrity Council. We will discuss the problem of plagiarism in class, and there is more information about plagiarism on Blackboard under the Writing Resources tab.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**

Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the [Code of Academic Integrity](https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity). If you have any questions about whether or not particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university and may include a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the SRR website (<https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity>).

**RESPONSIBLE USE OF GENERATIVE AI TOOLS (GAI)**

GAI tools such as ChatGPT are becoming important resources in many fields and industries. Accordingly, you are permitted to use such tools to generate content submitted for evaluation in this course, as well as to help generate ideas and brainstorm. However, you should note that the material generated by these tools may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that use may also stifle your own independent thinking and creativity. You remain responsible for all content you submit for evaluation.

If you include content that was generated, in whole or in part, by GAI tools in work submitted for evaluation in this course, you must document and credit your source. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-4 should include a citation such as: “ChatGPT-4. (YYYY, Month DD of query). ‘Text of your query.’ Generated using OpenAI. https://chat.openai.com/.” Material generated using other tools should be cited accordingly. Failure to do so in this course constitutes failure to attribute under the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity.

**WRITING SUPPORT**

GW’s Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online at [gwu.mywconline](https://gwu.mywconline.com/).

**SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

GW’s Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Additional information is available at https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu.

**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES 202-994-5300**

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations, confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information see: counselingcenter.gwu.edu/

**UNIVERSITY POLICY ON RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: [provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines](http://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines).

**CLASSROOM RECORDING**

This class will not be recorded. For students who have a legitimate reason for missing class, I will provide a way to make-up the coursework for the participation grade (usually by having you write up short responses to the small group questions) and provide my course prep slides.

1. This syllabus is largely based on Eric Kramon’s syllabus. I am grateful to him for allowing me to borrow from his approach, which has been very effective for many years. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)