

# POLS 359: Research Design

Cal Poly, Dept. of Political Science  
Spring 2019

Meeting times: (1) M/W 8:10-10:00  
(2) M/W 12:10-2:00

Meeting places: (1) Agricultural Engineering (Bldg 08), Rm. 0121  
(2) Food Processing (Bldg 24) Rm. 0108

Instructor: Dr. Nancy Arrington  
Email: [naarring@calpoly.edu](mailto:naarring@calpoly.edu)  
Phone: (805) 756-2757  
Office: Bldg 47, Room 11M

Office hours: M, 10:15-12:00  
W, 10:15-12  
And by appointment

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## Course Description

How do we – as scholars – learn new things? And, how do we know if what we’ve learned is trustworthy or good?

This 10-week, crash-course in Research Design will introduce students to the theory and method of contemporary, empirical political analysis. Together, the class will work through the stages of a research project – asking a good question, developing clear concepts, generating a causal theory, formulating hypotheses, and then designing an empirical strategy to best test specific hypotheses. At each stage, the concepts addressed will apply to students’ own projects. These projects will culminate in original, unique research design paper (approximately 15-20 pages in length) due at the end of term.<sup>1</sup>

A few key assumptions permeate this course:

1. Allegiance to the scientific method promotes intellectual rigor and accountability.
2. Writing well is hard, but writing well is something that all students can – and in this course, *will* – accomplish with practice and diligence.
3. Descriptive research is valuable, but I encourage students to conduct causal, generalizable studies.
4. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches to empirical research are equally useful; the selection of a method is guided by its usefulness and feasibility for a given hypothesis rather than a belief that certain methodological approaches are inherently more worthy than others.

## Course Goals and Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to prepare you to read, interpret, critique and conduct research in political science (and beyond!).

By the end of the course you will know how to...

- Propose a compelling puzzle or ask a compelling research question.
- Understand, synthesize, and organize extant knowledge into a concise and specific literature review.
- Develop a theoretical model to explain a political phenomena.
- State the observable implications of a theoretical model in the form of testable hypotheses.
- Develop an empirical strategy to best test specific hypotheses.

Specific learning objectives for this course include:

- Honing the skill (it is a skill!) of efficient and effective reading.
- Using the scientific method to guide the research process.
- Internalizing the intuition behind inferential research (in which scholars use specific data to learn about generalizable or global patterns.)
- Practicing the skill of describing complex ideas in clear and concise writing.

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<sup>1</sup>Strategic students might consider choosing a topic that reflects or parallels a potential senior thesis project.

## Attendance, In-class Assignments, and Quizzes

Learning how to conduct research – asking good questions, developing persuasive theories and models, designing appropriate empirical tests, and communicating findings – is best done by *doing*. **In lieu of taking formal attendance, you will receive grades for in-class assignments and quizzes.** Grades will be based either on the quality of work or on the completion of work, at my discretion. **Quizzes will be both announced and unannounced.** I will drop your lowest *one in-class assignment and lowest one quiz grade.*

Announced quizzes will cover all terms and concepts discussed in class and/or readings prior to the quiz date. While there are no formal midterm or final exams, you are expected to keep up to date and on top of the course content. Announced quizzes are an additional incentive to study the course material as we work go.

Unannounced quizzes will cover the day's assigned reading materials. These quizzes serve two purposes: (1) they provide an extra incentive for completing the readings and (2) they provide feedback to me about your understanding and mastery of the material. You will have some type of assignment or quiz almost every class.

If you miss class it is your responsibility to (1) reach out to classmates to request notes from the day and (2) request in class assignments to complete on your own time. In line with Cal Poly Policy (<https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/academicpolicies/class-attendance>), I only allow make-up quizzes for documented, excusable absences including illness, serious family emergency, active participation in university events, field trips, religious holidays, military service, IRA competitions, jury duty or required court appearance, and job/internship interviews.

## Grading

Your final grade is a weighted average of the assignments listed in the table below.

Assignment	Percent	Due
In-class Assignments	7.5%	—
Quizzes	22.5%	—
In Class Participation	5%	—
Research Design Project (65% total)		
Research Topic	1%	M, 4/8 in class
Research Q Assignment	4%	W 4/10 in class
Annotated Bibliography	5%	M, 4/22 in class
Literature Review Assignment	10%	M, 4/29 in class
Theory Assignment	10%	W, 5/8 in class
Empirical Strategy Outline	10%	F, 5/24, 5:00PM, email to Dr. A
Draft 1*	5%	M, 6/3, 5:00PM, email to partner and Dr. A
Peer Review Comments	5%	M, 6/5 in class
Final Research Design Paper	15%	W, 6/12, 5:00pm, Dr. A's office

*\*Draft 1 graded on completion, effort, and timeliness.*

## Course Grade Expectations

A numeric weighted average of grades on course assignments will translate to final letter grades according to the thresholds below. I will not “bump-up” student grades.

- A (93.0-100%) Exceptional Performance
- A- (90.0-92.99%) Excellent Performance
- B+ (87.0-89.99%) Very Good Performance
- B (83.0-86.99%) Good Performance
- B- (80.0-82.99%) Satisfactory Performance
- C+ (77.0-79.99%) / C (73.0-76.99%) / C-(70-72.99%) Adequate Performance
- D+ (70.0-69.99) /D(65.0-66.49%) Minimal Passing Performance
- F (Below 65.0%) Unacceptable Performance

## Course Policies

### Incomplete Grades

No incomplete grades will be given unless there is an agreement **prior** to the end of the course. Once an Incomplete has been given, it is the student’s responsibility to schedule meetings with me to facilitate the completion of the work.

### Late Assignments

Late assignments will be penalized five points for each day that they are late. Extensions may/will be made on a case-by-case basis. We all work and write at different paces, and that is OK. But this quarter moves fast, so students are strongly encouraged to finish each assignment as it comes.

### Extensions

Extensions will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Things happen, and I am happy to help you work around them with some increased flexibility. However, this quarter moves quickly and assignments are cumulative; I want to avoid one delayed due date snowballing into a semester of delayed work.

### Extra-Credit Work

Extra credit assignments will not be assigned. Do your work, participate, come to office hours. You’ll do great.

## Communication

In addition to announcements made in class, I will communicate with you through email. You are expected to check email regularly (daily, M-F). Likewise, I will check my email regularly during the work week and respond as promptly as possible, Monday through Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm. While I try to respond to student inquiries promptly, I make no promises about the timeliness of email responses in the evenings and on weekends.

## Integrity of Scholarship

I take the integrity of scholarship very seriously in this course. By taking this course, you affirm that it is against course standards to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from my instructions about collaboration on work submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that I am entitled to move you to another seat during quizzes without explanation.

Any evidence of cheating/plagiarism will be punished with an automatic 0 for the assignment. Severe offenses (defined at the instructor's discretion) will result in an automatic failure of the course. All cases of cheating will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, without exception.

For more information about Cal Poly's expectations for academic integrity see

<https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/academicpolicies/Cheating>

**The Department's Definition of Plagiarism** "Plagiarism is defined as the act of using the ideas or work of another person or persons as if they were one's own without giving proper credit to the source. Such an act is not plagiarism if it is ascertained that the ideas were arrived through independent reasoning or logic or where the thought or idea is common knowledge. Acknowledgement of an original author or source must be made through appropriate references; i.e., quotation marks, footnotes, or commentary. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to the following: the submission of a work, either in part or in whole completed by another; failure to give credit for ideas, statements, facts or conclusions which rightfully belong to another; failure to use quotation marks (or other means of setting apart, such as the use of indentation or a different font size) when quoting directly from another, whether it be a paragraph, a sentence, or even a part thereof; close and lengthy paraphrasing of another's writing without credit or originality; use of another's project or programs or part thereof without giving credit."  
<https://politicalscience.calpoly.edu/students/advising/policy>

**The Department's Definition of Cheating** "Cheating is defined as obtaining or attempting to obtain, or aiding another to obtain credit for work, or any improvement in evaluation of performance, by any dishonest or deceptive means. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: lying; copying from another's test or examination; discussion at any time of answers or questions on an examination or test, unless such discussion is specifically authorized by the instructor; taking or receiving copies of an exam without the permission of the instructor; using or displaying notes, "cheat sheets," or other information devices inappropriate to the prescribed test conditions; allowing someone other than the officially enrolled student to represent same."  
<https://politicalscience.calpoly.edu/students/advising/policy>

## **Access, Disability Services, and Resources**

I am committed to providing appropriate accommodations. If you have a disability-related need please contact the Disability Resource Center at Cal Poly immediately: <http://drc.calpoly.edu/content/drc-services>, (805) 756-1395. If you need immediate accommodations or physical access, please let me know. You can email me, come to office hours, or schedule a one-on-one meeting. I want everyone to learn and will do what I can to facilitate that process.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

My goal is to create a learning environment that enables all students to succeed and know that their experiences are valid. I expect students to treat each other with kindness and civility. For more information on resources related to diversity and inclusion, please visit the Office of University Diversity & Inclusivity website at <http://diversity.calpoly.edu>. If you notice behaviors or institutions in our class that you feel undermine or obscure diversity and inclusion, please share those concerns with me (if you are comfortable doing so). If you are uncomfortable sharing concerns with me, please feel free to contact Dr. Elizabeth Lowham at [elowham@calpoly.edu](mailto:elowham@calpoly.edu)

## **Needs Support**

If you face challenges securing food, housing, or other human needs know that you are not alone and Cal Poly can help. You can find resources available to support you through Cal Poly's Basic Needs Initiative at <https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative> and information about the Food Pantry and Meal Vouchers at <https://studentaffairs.calpoly.edu/hunger>

## **Class Schedule**

Any changes to the schedule below will be announced in class as soon as possible and an updated syllabus will be emailed.

Date	Topic	Reading	Things Due
W, 4/3	Intro, Social Science and the Scientific Method	Almond and Genco (1977). "Cloud, Clocks, and the Study of Politics"	
M, 4/8	Research Questions and Puzzles	Gerber et al. (2008) "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout." Introduction only (Pg33 to the top of 2nd column of 34)  Ziblatt. (2009) "Shaping Democratic Practice..." Introduction only (pg 1 to 2nd column of page 2)"	Topic due
W, 4/10	Concepts and Conceptualization	Excerpt, Pitkin "The Concept or Representation"	Research Question due
M 4/15	Literature Review	Gerber et al. (2008) "Shaping Democratic Practice..." Intro and Lit review (pg33 to the first column pg35)  "They Say, I Say" Ch. 1-3	
W, 4/17	Theory, Models and Variables	Gerber et al (2008). "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout." Skim the section called "The Calculus of Voting" (start pg 35)  Ziblatt (2009) "Shaping Democratic Practice..." pg 1-3	QUIZ
M, 4/22	Theory, Models, Variables, and Hypotheses	Remler and Van Ryzin Chapter 2 (page 35-53).	Annotated Bib
W 4/24	Operationalizing and Measurement	Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 3 (pg. 59-92); Ziblatt (2009) pg 1-9	

Date	Topic	Readings	Things Due
M, 4/29	Causal Inference, Experiments	Gerber et al (2008) pg 36- end	
W, 5/1	Ethnography and participant observation	Excerpt, Fenno "House Members in their Home Districts"	Lit review assignment
M, 5/6	Process Tracing	Zibblatt (2009) pg 12-18; "Silver Blaze" <a href="https://sherlock-holm.es/stories/pdf/a4/1-sided/silv.pdf">https://sherlock-holm.es/stories/pdf/a4/1-sided/silv.pdf</a>	QUIZ
W, 5/8	Content analysis	Text Analysis of Trump's Tweets, <a href="http://varianceexplained.org/r/trump-tweets/">http://varianceexplained.org/r/trump-tweets/</a> (Ignore the code)	Theory due
M, 5/13	Online class: the anatomy of a research project		
W, 5/15	Interviews, Surveys, Polling	Leech (2002). "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi-Structured Interviews."	QUIZ
M, 5/20	One-on-One meetings		



Date	Topic	Readings	Things Due
W, 5/22	Crash Course in Quant Methods	Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 4 (pg. 95-139)	Empirical Strategy due Fri 24th, 5:00 pm
M, 5/27	<i>Memorial Day</i>		
T, 5/28	Online Class: Writing Research Papers in Poli Sci	The Craft of Research, Ch 12, 13, 16	
W, 5/29	Ethics	Fujii (2012). "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities"	QUIZ
M, 6/3	In-class work day		Draft due, 5:00 pm
W, 6/5	Peer Paper Workshop		Peer Comments Due in class
W, 6/12			Final papers due