How do political scientists investigate puzzles and defend their conclusions? This course illuminates this question by examining approaches that researchers use to understand political events and processes. In doing so, the course provides students with skills—such as the ability to evaluate and conduct research—that are helpful to completing capstones, theses, and dissertations and succeeding in a variety of careers. Students will learn and apply key techniques, including inductive and deductive reasoning, hypothesis construction, operationalization of concepts, measurement, sampling and probability, causal inference, and the logic of controls. They will use these techniques to develop a research question, conduct a literature review, and craft a research proposal. By the end of the semester undergraduates and graduate students will have a proposal that can be used as the foundation for capstone, thesis, or dissertation prospectus, respectively. This proposal can also serve as part of a grant application, particularly for those interested in original data collection.

### Course Materials

**Books and Articles:** The books *Political Science Research Methods* (9th edition) and *Case Study Research* (2nd edition) are available for purchase at the bookstore. Obtain the correct editions. Other course materials are available on Canvas under Course Documents, unless otherwise noted with the citations. *Political Science Research Methods* provides basic descriptions of the techniques we will be using in class and some examples of their application. Chapters from other methodological texts, such as *Case Study Research*, will augment these descriptions, and articles from the mass media and publications by the instructor and other researchers will provide examples of applying these techniques. Paper or electronic copies of readings should be brought to class the days they are assigned.

**News:** Students are strongly encouraged to follow national and world news in part because awareness of political events and trends can help students develop research questions. These sources offer high quality coverage:

- *The New York Times* can be accessed for free by CWRU students by following the instructions at [https://researchguides.case.edu/NYT](https://researchguides.case.edu/NYT)

- *The Economist* can be accessed for free by CWRU students by selecting *The Economist* at [https://researchguides.case.edu/az.php?a=e](https://researchguides.case.edu/az.php?a=e)

- National Public Radio (WKSU 89.7 FM) broadcasts brief news updates at the top of the hour and news analyses throughout the day. See [www.wksu.org](http://www.wksu.org) for the schedule, recordings, and podcasts.

**Canvas:** Students will post assignments on Canvas. Under Discussions, select the appropriate assignment and follow the instructions there.
Course Requirements

**Project:** Students will work on their own projects during the semester so that they can practice using techniques they learn and so that they will be better prepared to begin a capstone, thesis, or dissertation. The project consists of the following assignments. To turn in each assignment, including visuals from the presentation, post the file on Canvas before the start of class on the day it is due or, in the case of the final proposal, by the listed deadline. Bring a paper or an electronic copy with you to class as we will often work on them.

**Research Topic** (September 1) Students should write a one-paragraph description of a political research topic that they may want to study during this semester and in the future. Proposing more than one is fine, but each should be described in its own paragraph. To develop a topic, students should draw on their knowledge of national and world affairs from the media, think about their interests, and review their notes and readings from previous classes. These courses may include those outside of the discipline, such as history or psychology, as other fields also bring to light political concerns. Research does not need to be conducted to select a topic. Only a research topic, not a research question, is required. Grading of topic descriptions will be based on the detail provided and the quality of writing.

**Research Question** (September 6) Students should write one political science research question, based on their research interests; their reading of reviews of the field, subfield, and research topics; and class readings and exercises about question development. Students should be interested enough in the question to make it the focus of their projects for this course. Students will be able to adapt it over the next few weeks.

**Literature Review** (September 22)—The literature review should explain how answering the research question will contribute to existing knowledge in the field, should include a single-spaced works cited, and should otherwise be four to five double-spaced pages long. Grading will be based on the extent to which the review makes a compelling case that answering the research question will contribute to the field, represents progress conducting research on the question, is well written, and meets those additional criteria described in the Literature Review Writing and Feedback Guidelines.

**Experimental Design** (October 13)—In approximately three double-spaced pages, each student should state his or her research question and then propose a laboratory or field experiment by which it could be investigated. In explaining the experiment, the student should identify variables, measures, and a hypothesis. The experiment must be ethical. Grading will be based on the extent to which the description effectively applies this design approach, represents progress in thinking about the research project, is well written, and meets those additional criteria described in the Experiment Writing and Feedback Guidelines.

**Case Study Design** (October 27)—In approximately three double-spaced pages, each student should state his or her research question and then propose a case study design by which it could be investigated. In explaining the case study, the student should identify the case(s), variables, measures, and a hypothesis. Grading will be based on the extent to which the description effectively applies this design approach, represents progress in thinking about the research project, is well written, meets those additional criteria described in the Case Study Writing and Feedback Guidelines.

**Large-N Cross-Case Design** (November 10)—In approximately three double-spaced pages, each student should state his or her research question and then propose a large-n cross-case study by which it could be investigated. In explaining the large-n cross case study, the student should identify the variables, measures, a hypothesis, the sample, and the design type. Grading will be based on the extent to which the description effectively applies this design approach, represents progress in thinking about the research project, is well written, and meets those additional criteria described in the Large-n Writing and Feedback Guidelines.
First Version of Proposal (November 22)

Undergraduates should submit an 11 to 12-page double-spaced research proposal. The first page should include the title and an abstract. The remaining pages should include a statement of the research question, an explanation of why the question is theoretically and empirically important, a description of how the question will be investigated using two of the three design approaches, a discussion of data collection, and a description of how human subjects will be protected, and a single-spaced works cited. All proposals should draw on the literature reviews and design descriptions already written, and in selecting two designs students should consider which would be more feasible for a capstone, thesis, or dissertation. Grading will be based on the extent to which the proposal makes a compelling case for the research question and the designs, improves upon the earlier versions, is well written, and meets those additional criteria described in the Proposal Writing and Feedback Guidelines.

Graduate students should follow the proposal instructions above except 1) their proposal should include all three designs and 2) their proposals should be 14 to 15-pages double-spaced.

Presentation of Work in Progress (November 29 or December 1 or December 6) Each student will provide a four-minute oral overview of his/her/their proposal, keeping in mind that classmates will have read it in advance. The presentation should include visuals, and students should be prepared to respond to questions. Grading will be based on the extent to which the presentation makes a compelling case for the research question and the designs and the presentation is clear and engaging.

Final Proposal (Monday, December 12, 1:00 pm) For the final proposal, students should follow the instructions for the first version and incorporate useful suggestions from classmates and the instructor so that its quality improves. Grading will be based on the extent to which the proposal makes a compelling case for the research question and the designs, is an improvement upon the first version, is well written, and meets those additional criteria described in the Proposal Writing and Feedback Guidelines.

All written work should be carefully structured and grammatically correct. To avoid plagiarism of both published and classmates’ work, students should review “Plagiarism: What It Is and How to Recognize and Avoid It,” available on Canvas. Cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be investigated by university judicial bodies. Citations should be in a standard format of the student’s choosing. Either footnotes or parenthetical citations may be used.

Participation: The focus of each class will be on discussion. Students are expected to actively participate in discussion and exercises, and to thoughtfully evaluate their classmates’ work. Readings should be completed by the day they are listed on the syllabus. Students are encouraged to take notes on the readings in order to be prepared to integrate and critique the materials in class. Paper or electronic copies of readings should be brought to class the days they are assigned. Each student will provide written and oral comments on three or four classmates’ literature reviews, experimental designs, case study designs, and large-n designs and, depending on class size, four to five classmates’ first versions of proposals. Students will complete evaluations by the deadlines listed in the following Course Schedule and Readings. Grading of comments will be based on the detail provided. Because participation is critical to understanding the material, students are expected to attend all classes. Except under extraordinary circumstances—including COVID-19 illness, quarantine or isolation—absenteeism will negatively affect students’ final grades. If you must quarantine or isolate for COVID-19, please request notes from a classmate.
Class participation, attendance, and evaluation of classmates’ work will constitute 15 percent of the course grade, the research topic description and research question will together count for five percent, the final proposal for 20 percent, and each of the other six assignments as 10 percent. Students will lose a half a grade on any assignment for each day it is late, expect when experiencing extraordinary circumstances. Not completing an assignment will negatively affect a student’s final grade.
Course Schedule and Readings

I. Introduction to Research Methods and Course—Is political science a science?

August 30

II. Question Development—What makes for an effective research question?

September 1


DUE: Research Topic

September 6

DUE: Research Question

III. Literature Review—How will my research contribute to existing knowledge?

September 8

READ: Political Science Research Methods, 54-70.


Reviews of the field, subfield, and research topics that are relevant to your own research question and that are included in the sources below. Unless otherwise noted, the following reviews are available in hardcopy on reserve at Kelvin Smith circulation desk. The instructor will suggest for each student additional reviews or places to search for them by email.


The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy. eds. Barry R. Weingast and Donald Wittman (New York: Oxford, 2006). This handbook is broader than the name implies. continues


Annual Review of Political Science. Obtain through Kelvin Smith Library’s e-Journal portal, connecting with VPN software if you are off campus. Search for journal title first. It is worth examining the table of contents for the last two decades.

World Politics, a comparative politics and international relations journal, most issues have a review article at the end that examines the state of research on a particular topic. Obtain through Kelvin Smith Library’s e-Journal portal, connecting with VPN software if you are off campus. Search for journal title first. This journal has a search engine and reviewing the tables of contents back through the 2000s may also be helpful.

Perspectives on Politics, a disciplinary journal, most issues have a review essay that examines the state of research on a particular topic. Obtain through Kelvin Smith Library’s e-Journal portal, connecting with VPN software if you are off campus. Search for journal title first. This journal has a search engine and reviewing the table of contents back through 2003, when it began, may also be helpful.

Review of International Political Economy, a journal focused on international political economy, most issues have a review essay that examines the state of research of a particular topic. Obtain through Kelvin Smith Library’s e-Journal portal, connecting with VPN software if you are off campus. Search for journal title first. This journal has a search engine and reviewing the tables of contents back through the 1994, when it began, may also be helpful.

September 13, 15 NO CLASS: READ scholarly works related to your research question.
IV. Reasoning—How do I draw conclusions?

September 20

READ: Continue reading scholarly works related to your research question.

*Political Science Research Methods*, 121-133.

September 22

DUE: Literature Review

September 27—Literature Review Workshop

READ: Designated Classmates’ Literature Reviews

DUE: Comments on Designated Classmates’ Literature Reviews

V. Hypothesis Construction—How do I make my ideas testable?

September 29

READ: *Political Science Research Methods*, 73-85.

VI. Operationalization—How do I measure concepts?

October 4

READ: *Political Science Research Methods*, 86-98.


Continue reading scholarly works related to your research question, giving thought to how you could explore your question in an experiment.
VII. Research Design—Experiments

October 6


October 11  NO CLASS

October 13  NO CLASS

DUE:  Experimental Design

October 18—Experimental Design Workshop

READ:  Designated Classmates’ Experimental Designs

DUE:  Comments on Designated Classmates’ Experimental Designs

VIII. Research Design—Case Study

October 20


October 25  NO CLASS

October 27  NO CLASS

DUE:  Case Study Design

November 1—Case Study Design Workshop

READ:  Designated Classmates’ Case Study Designs

DUE:  Comments on Designated Classmates’ Case Study Designs
IX. Research Design—Large-N Cross-Case Studies

November 3

READ: *Political Science Research Methods*, 182-191.

Article manuscript by Kelly McMann and co-author. To be posted.

November 8  NO CLASS

November 10  NO CLASS

DUE: Large-N Cross-Case Design

November 15—Large-N Cross-Case Study Design Workshop

READ: Designated Classmates’ Large-N Cross-Case Designs

DUE: Comments on Designated Classmates’ Large-N Designs

X. Data Collection and Protection of Human Subjects—How can I obtain data and ensure no one is harmed?

November 17


*Case Western Reserve University—Faculty Handbook: University Standards for Humans Research Projection.* Read pages 1-6 to determine 1) under what conditions would your project be subject to IRB review? 2) what type of review? 3) what precautions would the IRB require you to take to protect human subjects?

November 22  NO CLASS

DUE: First Version of Proposal

November 24  NO CLASS
XI. Proposal Completion—Workshops and Consultations

**November 29—Workshop**
- **READ**: Designated Classmates’ First Versions of Proposals
- **DUE**: Comments on Designated Classmates’ First Versions of Proposals
- **DUE (designated students)**: Presentation of Work in Progress

**December 1—Workshop**
- **READ**: Designated Classmates’ First Versions of Proposals
- **DUE**: Comments on Designated Classmates’ First Versions of Proposals
- **DUE (designated students)**: Presentation of Work in Progress

**December 6—Workshop**
- **READ**: Designated Classmates’ First Versions of Proposals
- **DUE**: Comments on Designated Classmates’ First Versions of Proposals
- **DUE (designated students)**: Presentation of Work in Progress

**December 8—Consultation with Instructor**

Students will select a time slot December 6 or 8 to meet with the instructor.

**DUE**: Final Proposal posted by 1:00 pm, Monday, December 12