

GOVT 500 001: The Scientific Method and Research Design (3 Credits)

Fall 2015
Mondays, 7:20-10:00pm
Seminar Meeting Room: Innovation Hall 203

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Office Hours: Mondays, 4-6 pm, and Wednesdays, 2-4 pm

Course Description

This course grounds students in the principles of the scientific method as the framework for investigating all research questions in political science, whether qualitative or quantitative in character (or both). Focus is on sound and rigorous research design. Students will explore approaches and potential pitfalls to conceptualization, measurement, and causality. Along the way, students will investigate competing and complementary approaches to causal analysis. Students will examine case study, survey, experimental, game theory, and ethnographic research designs and assess the strengths and limitations of these approaches in our effort to build theories in social science.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the close of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and execute multiple social science research designs.
2. Identify the strengths and limitations of different research designs and methods.
3. Write a research proposal that can serve as a foundation for the Masters or PhD research proposal.
4. Orally present research concisely and in a way that engages academic as well as policy audiences.

Course Texts

Many of the course readings are available in electronic format and can be accessed through Mason's E-Journals: <http://library.gmu.edu>.

Students are encouraged to purchase the following texts:

- George, A. L. & Bennett, A. *Case Studies And Theory Development In The Social Sciences*. (MIT Press, 2005). (Available for purchase at the university bookstore)
- King, G., Keohane, R. O. & Verba, S. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. (Princeton University Press, 1994).

Instructor-Student Communication

I will respond to your emails within 48 hours. If I will be away from email for more than one day, I will post an announcement in the Blackboard course folder.

Before sending an email, please check the following (available on your Blackboard course menu) unless the email is of a personal nature:

1. Syllabus
2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
3. Help forum (Feel free to respond to other students in the Help forum if you know the answer.)
4. Blackboard videos on how to use Blackboard features
5. Blackboard Q&A, and
6. Technology Requirements

Mason EMAIL

- Mason requires that Mason email be used for all courses. I will be sending messages to your Mason email and you are responsible for making sure you have access to these messages.
- You may forward your Mason email to other accounts but always use your Mason email when communicating with me to allow verification of your identity.
- You are required to check your Mason email account regularly and to keep your mailbox maintained so that messages are not rejected for being over quota.
- When you email me, be sure to include GOVT800 at the beginning of the subject heading to alert me that I have received a message from one of my online students.

Course Logistics

This course will meet in seminar as well as use Blackboard to facilitate discussions outside of our weekly meetings. In a typical week:

- you will read about 100 and 200 pages and discuss the material with your classmates
- accomplish on-line activities
- work on assignments to be submitted in the Blackboard assignment drop box according to the assignment schedule.

To Access Blackboard

1. Go to <http://mymason.gmu.edu>.
2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Click on the 'Courses' tab.
4. Double-click on Double-click on GOVT-500-001 (Fall 2015) under the course listings.

Technical Help

- If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITU Support Center at 703.993.8870 or support@gmu.edu.
- If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu.

Course Requirements

The following requirements are designed to promote an optimal learning environment for motivated students. This syllabus is a contract; your continued enrollment in this class constitutes your acceptance of these requirements.

1. Students are expected to have read the assigned reading before completing assigned coursework.
2. Students will complete nine short papers, each 500 words in length. Paper topics are detailed in the course schedule below. ***Papers are to be submitted through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, on the day before the seminar meets.***
3. Students will complete online discussion posts. ***In weeks that have online discussions, initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.***
4. Students will submit a draft research proposal, 1,250 words in length. ***The draft research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday, November 15th.***
5. Students will submit a final research proposal, 2,500 words in length. ***The final research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Monday, December 14.***

Late Assignments Policy

One-third of a grade will be deducted for every day a paper is late. Incompletes—both for papers and for the seminar—will be extended only in cases of documented emergencies.

Student Responsibilities

Academic Integrity Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture.

Honor Code Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. The George Mason University Honor Code states: “Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee.” Students are encouraged to read the full Honor Code : <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/> and to remain vigilant against any violation of the Code in their own work. Any cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be pursued according to the guidelines detailed in the University Catalog.

Time Conflict George Mason University is committed to creating a welcoming, respectful and inclusive educational environment that values diversity. Students should review the syllabus at the beginning of the term to determine if there are any conflicts between class time and religious observance. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of these conflicts within the first week of the semester. <http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/>

MasonLive/Email (GMU Email) Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. [See <https://masonlivelogin.gmu.edu>].

Patriot Pass Once you sign up for your Patriot Pass, your passwords will be synchronized, and you will use your Patriot Pass username and password to log in to the following systems: Blackboard, University

Libraries, MasonLive, myMason, Patriot Web, Virtual Computing Lab, and WEMS. [See <https://password.gmu.edu/index.jsp>].

University Policies Students must follow the university policies. [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>].

Responsible Use of Computing Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].

University Calendar

Details regarding the current Academic Calendar. [See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/index.html>].

University Catalog

The current university catalog. [See <http://catalog.gmu.edu>].

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu>].

Netiquette For Online Discussions [1]

Our discussion should be collaborative, not combative; you are creating a learning environment, sharing information and learning from one another. Respectful communication is important to your success in this course and as a professional. Please re-read your responses carefully before you post them so others will not take them out of context or as personal attacks. Be positive to others and diplomatic with your words and I will try my best to do the same. Be careful when using sarcasm and humor. Without face-to-face communications your joke may be viewed as criticism. Experience shows that even an innocent remark in the online environment can be easily misconstrued.

[1] Netiquette prepared by Charlene Douglas, Associate Professor, College of Health & Human Services, GMU.

Student Services

Writing Center

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the [Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#).

Counseling and Psychological Services

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu>].

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy>].

Special Needs:

Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. Those seeking accommodations based on disabilities should contact the Disability Resource Center (703) 993-2474, or the Equity Office (703) 993-8730.

Enrollment:

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Registrar calendar: <http://summer.gmu.edu/>

To Access Blackboard

1. Go to <http://mymason.gmu.edu>
2. Login using your NETID and password
3. Click on the 'Courses' tab.
4. Double-click on GOVT-500-001 (Fall 2015) under the "Course List" heading

Grading:

Nine Short Papers, 20 points each	180
Research Proposal First Draft	80
Research Proposal Final Draft	140
Research Presentation	25
Online Participation	24
Class Participation	30
Two Peer Reviews	16
CGG Chapter 2 Problem Set	5
Total	500 points

Grading Scale:

A+: 490-500	A: 460-489	A-: 450-459
B+: 440-449	B: 410-439	B-: 400-409
C+: 390-399	C: 360-389	C-: 350-359
D+: 340-349	D: 310-339	D-: 300-309
F: 299 and below		

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings and Videos	Discussions and Assignments
1 8/31	Introduction and Tools of the Profession	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Charles King, "How to Think," http://faculty.georgetown.edu/kingch/How to Think.htm 2. Charles King, "Reforming the Conference Presentation, or What We Can Learn from Hollywood." <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 39, no. 04 (2006): 875-877. 3. Thompson, Clive. "PowerPoint Makes You Dumb." <i>The New York Times</i>, December 14, 2003, sec. Magazine. 4. Ron E. Hassner, "Sliding into Home Plate: How to Use Slideware to Improve Your Presentation (While Dodging the Bullets)." <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 38, no. 03 (2005): 393-397. 5. Bert Useem, "Choosing a Dissertation Topic." <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 30, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 213-216. 	<p>Participation Assignment: Introductions—Post your answers in the Student Introductions Discussion Forum. Introductions Due Sunday, 8/30 by 11:59pm.</p>
2 9/14	What Is Social Science?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. King, G., Keohane, R. O. & Verba, S. <i>Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research</i>. (Princeton University Press, 1994), Ch. 1, pp. 3-33, "The Science in Social Science" 2. Clark, W. R., Golder, M. & Golder, S. N. <i>Principles of Comparative Politics</i>. (CQ Press, 2013), Ch. 2, "What Is Science," pp. 19-48. 3. Clifford Geertz, <i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i>, Ch. 1, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," pp. 3-32. 	<p>Assignment: Problem Set—Complete the CGG Ch. 2 problem set and upload through the Blackboard assignment link. Assignment Deadline: Sunday, 9/13 by 11:59pm.</p> <p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Find a social science presentation on the web (you can find many here: https://www.ted.com/talks) and identify three strengths and three weaknesses of the talk. (2) Follow-up post—Watch one of the talks your group colleague has identified and suggest two ways the speaker could improve his/her talk.</p> <p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p>
3 9/21	Concepts and	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KKV, Ch. 2, "Descriptive Inference," pp. 34-74. 	<p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Identify two concepts, one for which you believe it is easy to</p>

	Measurement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Sartori, G. Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics. <i>The American Political Science Review</i> 64, 1033–1053 (1970). Adcock, R. & Collier, D. Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research. <i>American political science review</i> 95, 529–546 (2001) Collier, D. & Levitsky, S. Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research. <i>World Politics</i> 49, 430–451 (1996). 	<p>design measures and one which believe it is much more challenging to design clear measures. (2) Two follow-up posts—respond to two of your colleagues’ “tough” concepts and offer a possible solution for how these tough concepts can be operationalized.</p> <p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p> <p>Paper 1: Choose a concept to study. Construct two differing research designs that incorporate this concept. Convey to your reader how you conceptualize and measure this concept in the two research designs.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
4 9/28	Causality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> KKV, Ch. 3, "Causality and Causal Inference," pp. 75-114. McKeown, T. J. Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview: Review of King, Keohane, and Verba’s <i>Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research</i>. <i>International Organization</i> 53, 161–190 (1999). George, A. L. & Bennett, A. <i>Case Studies And Theory Development In The Social Sciences</i>. (MIT Press, 2005), Ch. 7, "Case Studies and the Philosophy of Science." Mahoney, J. & Goertz, G. A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research. <i>Political Analysis</i> 14, 227–249 (2006). 	<p>Mid Semester Survey – Please Complete by</p> <p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post— Consult the Tuesday Science section of the New York Times or the BBC Science section. Identify an article that forwards a scientific statement. Next identify how this statement could be falsified. (2) Two follow-up posts—Look at the Scientific Statements identified by two of your colleagues. Transform these scientific statements into a non-scientific statement, that is, a statement that CANNOT be falsified.</p> <p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p> <p>Paper 2: Choose a causal mechanism. Identify two different outcomes you anticipate might be shaped by this causal mechanism. Convey the findings of two political science articles (one for each outcome) regarding the nature of the relationship between the causal mechanism and the dependent variable.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
5 10/5	Case Study Analysis (CSA)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> George and Bennett, Chapters 3-6, pp. 67-123 and Chapters 8-10, pp. 151-231. Gerring, J. What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? <i>American Political</i> 	<p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Identify a pressing topic in the news and illustrate how a case study may help us better understand this topic. (2) Two follow-up posts—Identify potential insights as well as limitations of two of your colleagues’ case studies.</p>

		<p><i>Science Review</i> 98, 341–354 (2004).</p>	<p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p> <p>Paper 3: Conduct in brief a case study to address a compelling puzzle in the social sciences. Follow George and Bennett’s instructions (Part II of the text) in conducting your case study.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
6 10/13	Challenges to CSA: Case Selection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KKV, Ch. 4, Determining What to Observe," pp. 113-149. 2. Geddes, B. How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics. <i>Political Analysis</i> 2, 131–150 (1990). 3. George and Bennett, Chapter 11, "Integrating Comparative and Within-Case Analysis: Typological Theory," pp. 233-263. 	<p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Identify a compelling research question and cases that will help you address this question. Justify your selection of cases (2) Two follow-up posts—Address potential limits of two of your colleagues’ research designs. In Geddes’ words, address how the cases your colleagues have chosen might affect the answers they get.</p> <p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p> <p>Paper 4: Identify a compelling research question and cases that will help you address this question. Justify your selection of cases. Address the limits of your research design and, in Geddes’ words, address how the cases you choose may affect the answers you get.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
7 10/19	Complements to CSA: Survey Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brady, H. E. Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science. <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 33, 47–57 (2000). 2. Mitchell A. Seligson, “Improving the Quality of Survey Research in Democratizing Countries,” <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i>, 38(1), 51-56 (2005). 3. Alexandra Cole, “To Survey or Not to Survey: The Use of Exit Polling as a Teaching Tool,” <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i>, 36(2), 245-252 (2003). 	<p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Use Google Forms to create a three-question survey. Share your survey with your group members and answer the survey questions that your group colleagues share with you. (2) Follow-up post—analyze the data you collected and present your findings to the group.</p> <p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p> <p>Paper 5: Identify a research question you find compelling and two surveys that address this research question. Use the survey data sets to probe competing causal hypotheses identified in the literature. Report your findings.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard</p>

		4. Heath, A., Fisher, S. & Smith, S. "The Globalization of Public Opinion Research." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 8 , 297–333 (2005).	by 11:59 pm, Sunday.
8 10/26	Complements to CSA: Game Theory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Munck, G. L. Game Theory and Comparative Politics: New Perspectives and Old Concerns. <i>World Politics</i> 53, 173–204 (2001). 2. Clark, Golder and Golder, Ch. 3, "What Is Politics," Ch. 4, "What Is the State," pp. 49-137. 	<p>Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Identify a “game” with at least two players that you encounter in your daily life. Draw a game tree that illustrates the choices players make. Identify the preferences of each player. (2) Two follow-up posts—Solve, through backward induction, two of your group colleagues’ games.</p> <p>Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p> <p>Paper 6: Identify a research question that lends itself to game-theoretic analysis. Convey the findings of two political science articles that address this question – one article that applies game theory and one that uses an alternate method. Discuss the contributions and potential limitations of both articles’ approaches to answering the research question.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
9 11/2	Complements to CSA: Experiments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Druckman, J. N., Green, D. P., Kuklinski, J. H. & Lupia, A. The Growth and Development of Experimental Research in Political Science. <i>American Political Science Review</i> 100, 627 (2006). 2. Paluck, E. L. The Promising Integration of Qualitative Methods and Field Experiments. <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 628, 59–71 (2010). 3. APSA Comparative Democratization Newsletter, "Experiments and the Study of New Democracies," 9(3), October 2011. Brader, T., Tucker, J. A. & Duell, D. Which Parties Can Lead Opinion? Experimental 	<p>Paper 7: Identify a research question that lends itself to experimental analysis. Convey the findings of two political science articles that address this question – one article that applies an experimental approach and one that uses an alternate method. Discuss the contributions and potential limitations of both articles’ approaches to answering the research question.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>

		Evidence on Partisan Cue Taking in Multiparty	
10 11/9	Avoiding Pitfalls in Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maria Konikova, “How a Gay-Marriage Study Went Wrong,” <i>The New Yorker</i>, May 22, 2015. 2. Eugene Volokh, “Prof. Alice Goffman, ‘On the Run,’ and Driving a Gang Member Around, Looking for a Mutual Friend’s Killer,” <i>The Washington Post</i>, June 2, 2015. 3. Elman, Colin, and Diana Kapiszewski. “Data Access and Research Transparency in the Qualitative Tradition.” <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 47, no. 01 (January 2014): 43–47. 4. Moravcsik, Andrew. “Transparency: The Revolution in Qualitative Research.” <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 47, no. 01 (January 2014): 48–53. 5. Lupia, Arthur, and George Alter. “Data Access and Research Transparency in the Quantitative Tradition.” <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 47, no. 01 (January 2014): 54–59. 	<p>Paper 8: Identify a social science study that “went wrong.” Relate how the study and the researcher(s) transgressed, the academic community’s response to this transgression, and potential lessons learned from this example.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
11 11/16	The Art of Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. McGlinchey, Outline for Research Proposals 2. Thunder, D. “Back to Basics: Twelve Rules for Writing a Publishable Article.” <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 37, 493–495 (2004). 3. <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 34, no. 4 (2001) Symposium on the Dissertation Proposal: 841-854. 	<p>Paper: Draft Research Proposal—Using the insights of this week’s readings, write a 1,250 word draft research proposal. Successful proposals will offer clearly specified research questions, devote attention to conceptualization and measurement of outcomes and causes, justify case selection and research methodology, and engage the current literature related to the topic under investigation</p> <p>Draft Research Proposal Deadline: The draft research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday, November 15th.</p>

12 11/23	Research Proposal Workshop	Reading: Two Research Proposals (Instructor will assign)	<p>Round Robin of Peer Reviews: Write one page reviews for two of your colleagues' research proposals. Reviews are to be completed and uploaded to Blackboard prior to class. Please bring a hard copy of your reviews to class to facilitate discussion.</p> <p>Review Deadline: Reviews are due through Blackboard by 11:59pm, Sunday.</p>
13 11/30	Round Robin Presentation		<p>Presenters: 10-minute presentations. Review presentation insights from week 1 readings. Presentations will be recorded.</p>
14 12/7	End of Semester Debrief	Review Readings from Semester	<p>Paper 9: Identify at least one key insight from each week's readings for weeks 1-10. For each insight, explain (1) its importance for social science research, (2) how you might use this insight to instruct your own research and writing and (3) the pitfalls that might emerge if we ignore this insight. Post your list to Blackboard and bring a printed copy for discussion to seminar.</p> <p>Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</p>
	Final Research Proposal		<p>Final Research Proposal Deadline: The final research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Monday, December 14.</p>