

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
Undergraduate Research Practicum
PS 492¹
Summer/Fall 2020

Meetings:

1 hour per week, time TBD, via zoom (link will be provided separately)

INSTRUCTOR

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This is a research internship course. As such, it provides students with a hands-on introduction to the data generation process in the social sciences. Students will participate first-hand in an ongoing research project conducted by Professor Prorok, where they will aid in the collection and coding of observational data. In addition, students will learn about the role of data in political science research and will gain some preliminary exposure to analyzing quantitative data.

The nature of this course is very different from most social science courses. Rather than *consuming* research done by others by reading textbooks and scholarly articles, you will take the first steps toward becoming a *producer* of knowledge by helping build new data that will be used in the future to answer questions that existing research has not yet answered. This means that there often is no single “right” answer to a question that comes up in the course of your work. Students should be prepared to be intellectually challenged and open to improvisation during the course of their research. Students will become part of a research team that will work together over the course of several semesters towards a unified goal, will gain valuable experience in data collection and an introduction to data analytics, and will contribute to a project with both scholarly interest and important public policy implications. Students will also have the opportunity to develop their own research project under the supervision of Prof. Prorok.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester, students should have developed the following skills:

- Understand the purpose and logic of data generation in the social sciences;
- Experience first-hand the process of data generation, including the steps of conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement; and
- Undertake a research project from start to finish that includes, where appropriate, basic social scientific analyses, including written, tabular and visual representations of data.

¹ The content and structure of this course borrows heavily from Professor Livny’s PS292/492 syllabi, accessible here: <https://www.alivny.com/teaching>. Thanks to Dr. Livny for her generous help in developing this syllabus!

Course Materials

There is no textbook for the course. All required readings, including course readings and coding materials/instructions will be made available to students via a shared Box folder. Assignments and research work will require students to have regular access to a computer and reliable internet access. Students without these resources should speak with the instructor immediately.

Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated on the following bases:

1. Commitment and Attendance:

- a. First, students are expected to complete 9 hours (3 hrs per credit hour) of independent research work per week. Because this course will be conducted remotely this semester, where and when you do this work each week is up to you. However, all interns should hold themselves to a relatively set schedule, and should spend **no fewer than two hours** working during any one bloc. You must log your hours worked and progress made during each coding session, and report weekly progress to Professor Prorok (more on this below).
- b. In addition, interns will attend a weekly zoom meeting with the full intern team, time TBD. These meetings will last approximately 1 hour, and are not included in the 9 hours of research time each week. On even weeks, this meeting will involve discussion of outside readings devoted to learning more about the research process in the social sciences. During odd weeks, these meetings will involve a check-in with the research team, updates on progress, and time for questions that might be useful to discuss with everyone.
- c. Difficulty meeting deadlines or other scheduling issues should be brought up with Professor Prorok in advance. Time commitments are subject to reasonable alterations for illnesses or other unexpected events consistent with university attendance and absence policies, but any alterations to your weekly schedule should be discussed and cleared with Professor Prorok.

2. Assignments and In-Class Discussion:

- a. During **even-numbered** weeks, students will be assigned short readings and assignments to complete. Written work will not receive letter grades, but it will play a key role in class discussions. Therefore, completion of the readings and assignments is considered critical to successful completion of the course. Remember that much can be learned even from a failed attempt at completing an assignment, so long as students come to team meetings willing to discuss their experience.
- b. During **odd-numbered** weeks, students will complete readings and assignments designed to help them build their final research paper from start to finish. This will be completed in small pieces, so that by the end of the semester, students have essentially written a first draft of each section of their final paper.

- c. **Readings and written assignments should be completed outside of normal internship hours.** Time spent on them does not constitute research assistance.

3. Research Practicum:

- a. Your main responsibility for this course is your contribution to the research project that you will be a part of. You will be expected to complete research tasks in a reasonable time-frame, without sacrificing quality. Over the course of the semester, you should develop the ability to make independent decisions on common questions that come up during routine research tasks. However, to ensure that time is not wasted on small points, interns are encouraged to ask clarifying questions early and often, especially when just starting out on a new research task. You are especially encouraged to ask questions of each other (in addition to your supervisor) as questions arise – if one person has a question, chances are others do too! The majority of this discussion should occur via the Practicum’s dedicated Trello board(s) or during weekly meetings.
- b. When completing research tasks, it is critical that written protocols be followed closely and consistently. Take special note of data handling procedures such as how datasets and documents are to be organized, named, and saved.
- c. At the end of each work week, interns are required to report on their progress to their supervisor, via the designated Trello board. Their message should outline what work was completed in the previous week, over what hours, and what tasks they expect to complete in the coming week.

UIUC Department of Political Science Policies on Professional Conduct for a Research Assistantship (PS 292 or PS492)

Working with faculty on their projects is an excellent learning opportunity for students and the best way to learn how cutting-edge social science research is conducted in an academic environment. That said, students may only have interacted with faculty in the past in classroom settings, so the following are guidelines for how a research assistantship should proceed. These guidelines apply to all undergraduate research assistantships.

- All interactions should be respectful and courteous.
- Interactions should take place during business hours on campus or appropriate work sites.
- All work should pertain to the research project agreed upon at the beginning of the semester. This may involve retrieving relevant materials from libraries around campus, for example, but should not involve errands for the faculty or tasks unrelated to the project.
- All physical and personal boundaries of students and professors should be respected.
- Students should be given opportunities to voice their thoughts and ideas about the research, along with concerns and suggestions about the work requirements.
- Professors should be open to discussions of ways to improve the work environment/relationship.
- All criticism should be constructive, with the goal of fostering positive discussion.
- Judgments, jokes, or disparaging remarks based on stereotypes should be avoided.
- Departures from these stated policies should be reported to an advisor in political science or the Associate Head for Undergraduate Studies. Any violations of departmental or university policy should be reported (www.WeCare.Illinois.edu).

If, at any time, a student feels uncomfortable in a situation arising from a research assistantship, s/he should feel free to speak with an advisor or the Associate Head for Undergraduate Programs.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the course instructor and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call 333-4603, e-mail disability@illinois.edu or go to the [DRES website](#). If you are concerned you have a disability-related condition that is impacting your academic progress, there are academic screening appointments available on campus that can help diagnosis a previously undiagnosed disability by visiting the DRES website and selecting “Sign-Up for an Academic Screening” at the bottom of the page.

If you are interested in obtaining information to improve writing, study skills, time management or organization, the following campus resources are available to all students:

Writer’s Workshop

Undergrad Library

217-333-8796

<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop>

<http://disability.illinois.edu/strategies>

<http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/self-help-brochures/>

Also, most college offices and academic deans provide academic skills support and assistance for academically related and personal problems. Links to the appropriate college contact can be found by going to this website and selecting your college or school: <http://illinois.edu/colleges/colleges.html>

If you are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression or are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or in crisis, you can seek help through the following campus resources:

Counseling Center

206 Fred H. Turner Student Services Building

7:50 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday

Phone: 333-3704

McKinley Mental Health

313 McKinley Health Center

8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday

Phone: 333-2705

McKinley Health Education offers individual consultations for students interested in learning relaxation and other stress/time management skills, call 333-2714.

** above content on Accommodations taken from <http://disability.illinois.edu/academic-support/instructor-information/examples-disability-statements-syllabus>

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICY AND REPORTING

The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. As such, you should know that faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct—which also includes dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking—to the University’s Title IX and Disability Office. What this means is that as your instructor, I am required to report any incidents of sexual misconduct that are directly reported to me, or of which I am somehow made aware. When a report is received, an individual with the Title IX and Disability Office reaches

out to provide information about rights and options, including accommodations, support services, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options.

There is an exception to this reporting requirement about which you should be aware. A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found

here: wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential.

Other information about resources and reporting is available here: wecare.illinois.edu.

** Text from: <http://wecare.illinois.edu/faq/employees/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

http://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1_part4_1-401.html

VOTER REGISTRATION

Exercise your right to vote! Voter registration is open until October 18, 2020 in Illinois. For more information, see: <https://ova.elections.il.gov/>

Weekly Outline of Course Topics and Readings

Week 1 INTRODUCTION August 24-28, 2020

Readings:

- Alyssa Prorok. 2020. "Syllabus for PS 292."
- Alyssa Prorok & Elizabeth Menninga. 2018. "Tainting the Well or Priming the Pump? The Dynamics of Cooperation in Civil War." Project Description (Technical Narrative). Army Research Office (DoD) Grant Proposal. **Skim the first half to get the general idea of the full project, you do not need to read in detail.**
- Alyssa Prorok, Elizabeth Menninga, and Moonyoung Kim. 2020. "Coding Instructions for Phase 2 of Cooperation in Civil War Project, Step 1" **read this in more detail, come to first meeting ready to ask any questions you have.**

Assignment 1: In a short paragraph (and in your own words): what do you see as the key contribution of the research project? What aspect(s) are you most interested in yourself?

Week 2 IDENTIFYING PATTERNS AND PUZZLES August 31-Sept 4, 2020

Readings:

- Maryann Barakso, Daniel M. Sabet and Brian F. Schaffner. 2014. Understanding Political Science Research Methods: The Challenge of Inference. New York: Routledge. "The Challenge of Inference." pp. 11-27.

Assignment: Evaluate the figure(s) provided and see if you can identify a puzzle worth addressing. Write up a short description of what you see and what you find puzzling.

Week 3 THE STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH Sept 7-11, 2020

Readings:

- Tom Nicholas. 2017 "How to Use Google Scholar: Finding Journal Articles and Papers Made Easy." Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc-vKk205c8>.
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign University Library. "Google Scholar Configuration." Website. <https://www.library.illinois.edu/library-technology/google-scholar-configuration/>
- University of British Columbia iSchool. 2013. "How to Read an Academic Paper." Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKxm2HF_-k0.

Assignment: Start exploring broad topics of interest to you by using Google Scholar and reading strategically.

Week 4 ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL SCIENCE Sept 14-18, 2020

Readings:

- Janet Buttolph Johnson, H. T. Reynolds and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. Political Science Research Methods. Los Angeles: CQ Press. "Introduction." **Skim all of the following sections, choosing one to read more carefully:**
 - "Research on Inequality." pp. 6-14.
 - "Who Votes? Who Doesn't?" pp. 14-18.
 - "Politics and the Gender Gap." pp. 18-22.
 - "Repression of Human Rights." pp. 22-25.
 - "A Look into Judicial Decision Making and its Effects." pp. 25-31.
 - "Research on Public Support for US Foreign Involvement." pp. 40-44.

Assignment: Choose one of the topics introduced by Johnson et al. Identify at least one research question addressed in the existing social scientific literature and how data was used to answer it. What do you find interesting about this question and answer? What additional question(s) do they raise?

Week 5 **IDENTIFYING A QUESTION** **Sept 21-25, 2020**

Readings:

- Barbara Geddes. 2003. Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics. Chapter 2 ("Big Questions, Little Answers: How the Questions you Choose Affect the Answers You Get"), pp. 27-35. (E-Book available through the UIUC library catalog)

Assignment: Building upon the broad areas you read about in Week 3's assignment and/or the questions you raised in Week 4's assignment (or, if none of those excites you, choose something entirely different), identify three research questions that you might be interested in trying to answer. For each, identify the dependent variable.

Week 6 **WHAT DATA ARE** **Sept 28-Oct 2, 2020**

Readings:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. 2013. The Fundamentals of Political Science Research. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. "Thinking About the World in Terms of Variables and Causal Explanations." pp. 7-15.
- Maryann Barakso, Daniel M. Sabet and Brian F. Schaffner. 2014. Understanding Political Science Research Methods: The Challenge of Inference. New York: Routledge. "Different Types of Data." pp. 86-89.

Assignment: Evaluate the spreadsheets provided. For each, identify the unit of analysis and then pick out at least one pattern (across one or more dimensions) that you would want to explore. For the latter, explain your choice in a sentence or two.

Week 7 **DEVELOPING GOOD THEORIES** **Oct 5-9, 2020**

Readings:

- Barbara Geddes. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Chapter 5 (“How the Approach You Choose Affects the Answers You Get: Rational Choice and its Uses in Comparative Politics”), pp. 175-211.
- **OPTIONAL:** Kenneth Hoover and Todd Donovan. 2011. *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*, 10th Edition. Boston: Wadsworth. Chapter 4 (“Refinements”), pp. 58-77.

Assignment: Take one or two of your proposed research questions and think through a possible answer (or two). What is the logic connecting the question and your answer?

Week 8 **THE DATA-GENERATION PROCESS** **Oct 12-16, 2020**

Readings:

- Robert Adcock and David Collier. 2001. “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research.” *American Political Science Review* 95 (3): pp. 530-32.
- Janet Buttolph Johnson, H. T. Reynolds and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. *Political Science Research Methods*. Los Angeles: CQ Press. “The Building Blocks of Social Scientific Research: Measurement.” pp. 121-25, 130-32, 143-50.

Assignment: Take a background concept – “conflict” or “cooperation” – and offer a conceptual definition (“systematized concept”), a way of operationalizing it (into one or more “indicators”), and a possible measurement strategy (creating “scores for cases”). In a couple of sentences, consider the potential for measurement bias in your proposed strategy.

Week 9 **BUILDING A LITERATURE REVIEW** **Oct 19-23, 2020**

Assignment: Now that you’ve settled on a research question, begin building your literature review. Using Google scholar and library resources, identify some of the literature(s) relevant to your research question. Read them strategically and write a few paragraphs describing (a) the state of the existing literature and (b) what you think you are contributing to it. This will comprise the “Literature Review” section of your paper. This review should be strategic – you do not need summarize every relevant paper in detail, but should provide an overview of the current state of knowledge, any major gaps in existing knowledge, and how your research question contributes to the broad area of scholarship you’ve reviewed.

Week 10 **READY-MADE DATA** **Oct 26-30, 2020**

Readings:

- Gerardo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices.” *Comparative Political Studies*. 35 (1): pp. 5-34. (Read strategically!)

Assignment: Explore the “Macro Data Guide” (available at: <http://www.nsd.uib.no/macrodataloguide/index.html>) and identify one dataset that seems like it

could be useful for answering the research question(s) you've posed. Prepare some notes on the dataset – the variables included, how the data were collected, and how you think it could be used to answer your research question(s). In our weekly meeting, you'll be asked to introduce the dataset to the group.

Week 11 BUILDING YOUR THEORETICAL ARGUMENT Nov 2-6, 2020

Assignment: Building off of your literature review and your Week 7 assignment, write up a fuller account of the argument you are making. What are the logical steps connecting a change in your independent variable(s) to a change in your dependent variable(s)? How would you know if your proposed theory were right? What are some alternative arguments that could be made about your independent and dependent variables? How would you know if your argument (and not these alternatives) were correct?

Week 12 ASSESSING BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS Nov 9-13, 2020

Readings:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. 2013. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. "Bivariate Hypothesis Testing." pp. 145-67.

Assignment: Drafting a Research Design

Now that you've drafted your literature review and theory and have formulated testable hypotheses with clearly identifiable independent and dependent variable(s), write out how you would test the theory you've developed. Will you use quantitative data? If so, are there readily available datasets that you could use? Will you instead use qualitative case study evidence to test your theory? If so, what cases would you choose, and why?

Week 13 ADD SOME DATA/EVIDENCE Nov 16-20, 2020

Optional Readings if you plan to include quantitative data analysis in the paper:

- "Getting Started: The Basics of R." <https://www.r-bloggers.com/how-to-learn-r-2/#h.nl3rvdr3ycsc>
- "Importing Data." <https://www.statmethods.net/input/importingdata.html>
- "This R Data Import Tutorial Is Everything You Need." <https://www.datacamp.com/community/tutorials/r-data-import-tutorial>
- Frequencies and Crosstabs. <https://www.statmethods.net/stats/frequencies.html>
- t-tests. <https://www.statmethods.net/stats/ttest.html>
- Scatterplots. <https://www.statmethods.net/graphs/scatterplot.html>
- Correlations. <https://www.statmethods.net/stats/correlations.html>

Assignment: Adding Some Data

IF you plan to use quantitative evidence in your paper, download RStudio onto your computer (<https://rstudio.com/products/rstudio/download/>) and follow one of the online tutorials (see links above) to try and open a dataset you've identified as useful for testing the hypothesis you've

developed. See if you can test your hypothesis in any one of the following ways: (i) calculate a crosstabulation; (ii) conduct a difference-of-means t-test; (iii) create a scatterplot (with a fitted line), placing the variable you think is the independent variable on the x-axis and the one you think is the dependent variable on the y-axis; and/or (iv) calculate the correlation between the two and see if it is statistically significant. Write a brief summary of what you find. Incorporate your findings into the final draft of your research paper.

If you choose not to use quantitative data, but instead to engage in a qualitative analysis, draft this portion of the paper, being sure to use qualitative evidence strategically to support your theoretical argument.

Week 15

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Nov 30-Dec 4, 2020

Assignment: Now that you've drafted all the main components of your research design paper, put them all together and add an introduction and conclusion to tie everything together. Choose one of your favorite scholarly articles (not a text book) that you've read during the course as a model for how to organize your paper and for what should be included in an introduction.

The final draft of your paper is due on the last day of classes.