

PSC 502 Research Design  
T 2:30–5:20  
Office hours: TR 10–12 OBA

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This course focuses on research design. I assume that you have taken PSC 500 or are otherwise familiar with the basics of philosophy of science and the rudiments of research design. The course has three main purposes. First, to help students choose interesting and researchable topics for seminar papers, theses, and dissertations. Second, to help students gain a more careful and nuanced understanding of research strategies. And third, to introduce students to a variety of methods they might use in their own research.

The principal focus of the class is dealing with the fundamental research design issues in your own research agenda. These issues are legion. Also, by the end of the course you should have a better idea of the research methods most appropriate to your agenda. Ideally, you will be working on a real problem that you actually want to research.

#### Requirements and grading:

- One-page reaction papers, every week UNLESS a proposal draft is due that week. Together with attendance and participation, 30% of the course grade. Reaction papers are due the Friday preceding each class.
- Three iterations of a paper/thesis/dissertation proposal. 40%.
- A final exam. 30%.

#### Assigned texts:

- KKV: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*.
- Geddes: Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*
- HM: Mel Hinich and Mike Munger, *Analytical Politics*
- JR: Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*
- Davis: James Davis, *The Logic of Causal Order*. Presumably not the Garfield guy.
- Morton: Becky Morton, *Methods and Models*.
- Occasional articles TBA

#### Reaction papers:

Reaction papers are short, one side of one page discussions that spring from the reading. Reaction papers:

- Are in a 12-point font.
- Use whatever margins you want - if you can fit it on a page-side, you're okay.
- Do not summarize the readings any more than is absolutely necessary to illustrate whatever point you are making.
- Take up some issue, ideally something that sincerely annoys you. For example:
  - Geddes says **this**, but the following people didn't follow her advice and their research is excellent because...
  - The readings disagree about **that**. So-and-so is right because...
  - KKV argue that **blah**. They are wrong-headed morons because...
  - Somebody wrote **this paper**. The paper is garbage because they didn't follow the advice of So-and-so. They should have done **this**.

**Schedule:**

15 January	Introduction, bureaucratic details
22 January	Choosing a research topic, types of data and where you find them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geddes 1,2</li> <li>• JR 1,2</li> <li>• KKV 1</li> </ul>
29 January	Thinking about the problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JR 3,6</li> <li>• KKV 2</li> <li>• <b>First proposal draft due</b></li> </ul>
5 February	Developing theories, causality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davis, all</li> <li>• KKV 3</li> </ul>
12 February	Case selection, crucial tests, experimental designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KKV 4</li> <li>• Geddes 3</li> <li>• JR 5</li> </ul>
19 February	Operationalization and measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geddes 4</li> </ul>
26 February	Rival hypotheses, internal and external validity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JR 4</li> </ul>
4 March	Using evidence, problems to avoid <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KKV 5,6</li> <li>• <b>Second draft proposals due for peer review</b></li> <li>• <b>Second draft proposals must include preliminary evidence</b></li> <li>• Each proposal will be assigned to two reviewers. Each review should discuss issues such as validity, case selection, data sources, operationalization, potential endogeneity, and so on. Reviews should be critical but positive, and should discuss possible solutions to problems.</li> </ul>
11 March	Spring break
18 March	The proposals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class presentation of proposals</li> <li>• Reviews due - one copy for the proposal author, one to me</li> </ul>
25 March	Choosing methods and approaches: Qualitative methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JR 8, 9, 10</li> <li>• More TBA?</li> </ul>
1 April	Choosing methods and approaches: Quantitative methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geddes 5, 6</li> <li>• JR 7, 11, 12, 13</li> </ul>

8 April	Choosing methods and approaches: Formal models <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HM: all</li> </ul>
15 April	Choosing methods and approaches: EITM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morton, all</li> </ul>
22 April	Wrap-up, slush, review, further discussion of student research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Final proposal due</b></li> </ul>
WHENEVER SCHEDULED	Final exam

**Proposal draft 1**  
**Due 29 January**

Please respond to each numbered item separately, rather than trying to integrate everything into an essay.

Respond carefully and as in depth as you can at this point. This should be a problem or topic that you actually find interesting - something that you can imagine expanding to a seminar paper, conference paper, journal submission, or a thesis or dissertation chapter.

- 1) What is the title of your project?
- 2) What difference or anomaly do you want to explain? Why would I care about it? What hole in the literature or mistake in the literature (as you understand it now) does your proposal address?
- 3) What is your theory? What do you think is really going on? What causal process do you think is taking place? Be as clear, careful, and specific here as you can. Clarity and specificity here will make part (4) much easier.
- 4) List as many observable implications of your theory as you can think of. Write these out in complete sentences, e.g. if X causes Y, then I would expect to see Z under W circumstances. Remember to look at all parts of your proposed causal process, your *theory*, for less obvious, unintuitive, or counterintuitive observable implications.