PLSC 476: Empirical Legal Studies

Research Module Summary

A bit more than half of the grade in this course is based upon *research modules*. These are short, focused reports of original research. Each student will be responsible for writing four such modules. The first such module will be assigned the week of February 1, and will be a "common" assignment – all class members will complete the same assignment. That module will be due on February 15. The remaining three modules are organized around one of the weekly (or so) "themes" in the course. These themes are:

1. Personal Attribute Models (February 16-18)

2. Political Ideology (February 23-25)

3. Legal Influences (March 2-4)

4. Public Opinion (March 16-18)

5. Separation of Powers (March 23-25)

6. Legal Education (March 30 - April 1)

7. Law Firms / Careers (April 6-8)

8. Criminal Law (April 13-15)

9. Civil Law / Litigation (April 20-22)

Each student is required to complete three such "topical" modules before the end of the semester. Each research module will address a topic or question empirically, using data on the subject and the tools learned and discussed in class to offer an empirical answer to it. Some example topics (purely for illustration) include:

- Are female Supreme Court justices more likely to vote in support of sex discrimination claimants than their male counterparts?

- Are there regional differences in Supreme Court justices' votes in environmental cases?

- Does public opinion respond negatively to unpopular Supreme Court decisions?

- Is it better (in terms of landing a job at a law firm) for someone to be a top student at a lower-ranked law school, or a terrible student at a higher-ranked one?

- Are there generational differences in how satisfied practicing attorneys are with their career choice?

- Are individuals released from prison early less likely to reoffend than those who serve their entire term?

While there are no strict minimums or maximums, research modules should generally be 3-4 pages long, and will include 2-3 graphs and between 500 and 1000 words of text. They will be written in sections, with the first setting out the question to be investigated, the second describing the data and the empirical approach, and the third setting forth the findings. Modules on any topic can be completed at any time, though you will likely find it useful to have covered the material in class prior to completing the research module. **All research modules must be received by the professor no later than 11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, April 30, 2021, or no credit will be given.**