POLI SCI 210
Introduction to
Empirical Methods in Political Science
Winter 2025

Instructor: Gustavo Diaz (gustavo.diaz@northwestern.edu)
Time and Place: Tues/Thurs 11:00am – 12:20pm, Kresge Centennial Hall 2-415
Canvas: TBD
Student Hours: TBD or by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

- TBD 1
- TBD 2

Course Overview

This course introduces the empirical methods used by political scientists to answer research questions, including their appropriate application, advantages, and shortcomings. You will learn how researchers use data in social science contexts, with a particular emphasis on political science topics, across three broad areas: quantitative studies (statistical methods), experimental studies, and qualitative studies. This course prepares students to read and evaluate research in subsequent courses on substantive social science topics.

Learning Objectives

- Identify and explain descriptive and causal inference approaches, as well as their challenges in political science
- Evaluate inferential claims in academic social science research
- Identify types of research designs, explain their strengths and weaknesses, and discuss alternative approaches
- Communicate research processes and findings

Requirements

There are no requirements to take this course, which is required for Political Science majors. This course also counts toward the Empirical and Deductive Reasoning requirement (formerly known as Formal Studies Distribution Area) at Weinberg College.

Required reading

Textbook

Clipperton, Jean, et al. 2020. *Empirical Methods in Political Science An Introduction*. Northwestern University Libraries

This is a FREE resource available through the link above. The rest of the syllabus will refer to the textbook as **EMPS** for short.

Any other supplemental material or reading will be linked in the schedule below and available on Canvas.

Assignments

This course uses a labor-based grading agreement, commonly known as contract grading. In this course, instead of being given a final grade based on how "good" your submitted assignments are, your final grade will be based on the amount of labor you put into the course. The goal is to decouple grades from performance and emphasize learning and effort.

Each assignment is worth a number of points. You need 240 points out of a total of 350 to receive an A.

There are five types of assignments:

1. **Quizzes** (10 points each)
2. **Research design critiques** (10 points each)
3. **AI memos** (10 points each)
4. **Section participation** (10 points each)
5. **Research design proposal** (30 points)

With the exception of quizzes, which award points based on correct answers, all assignments are marked as complete or incomplete. You receive full points for every complete assignment.

The weekly assignments are due on Fridays at 11:59 PM of the week they are assigned. You can choose which assignments to complete, but you will be deducted 20 points if you have not obtained at least 100 points by Friday, February 14.

As a point of reference, assuming an X week quarter, you should average 2 complete assignments every week.

Quizzes

Research design critiques

AI memos

Section participation

Research design proposal

Grading

The following table translates points to letter grades.

[TABLE HERE]

Schedule

Week 1 (January 7/9): Introduction and Overview
EMPS Chapter 1-2

Week 2 (January 14/16): Theory and Data
EMPS Chapters 3-4

Week 3 (January 21/23): Inference
EMPS Chapter 5

Week 4 (January 28/30): Surveys
EMPS Chapter 6

Week 5 (February 4/6): Experiments
EMPS Chapter 7

Week 6 (February 11/13): Large N
EMPS Chapter 8

Week 7 (February 18/20): Quasi-Experiments
Reading TBD

Week 8 (February 25/27): Small N
EMPS Chapter 9

Week 9 (March 4/6): Machine Learning
EMPS Chapter 12

Week 10 (March 11/13) Weinberg College Reading Period NO CLASS

Northwestern University Syllabus Standards

This course follows the Northwestern University Syllabus Standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.