Dr. Brian F. Crisp
291 Seigle Hall
crisp@wustl.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

Political Science 495: Research Design and Methods

Course Overview:

This course is designed to provide you with analytical skills for evaluating and carrying out research about social phenomena, particularly political ones. Put differently, the course will help students discriminate between good and bad research.

Many aspects of political science pose important questions that, in principle, have a correct answer. Research on campaign finance investigates whether restrictions on spending or raising money affect the quality of representation. Students of electoral laws typically ask whether certain types of rules affect the number and character of parties contesting elections and holding office. International relations scholars ask how and to what extent alliance agreements prevent conflict. Such questions have attracted multiple efforts to provide an answer, and those answers often conflict with one another. Which answer is correct? More accurately, in which answer should we have the most confidence and why? The "why" here is a matter of research design.

The skills developed in this course are critical to conducting original research and thus an important foundation for writing a thesis. A convincing thesis must present original research that persuasively engages a theoretical model. To do that, a scholar must correctly evaluate existing research on the topic – determining a place for an original and valuable contribution. He or she must also work diligently to assure that there is no disjuncture between the theory posed and the empirics conducted (it's harder than you might think!). The empirics conducted must involve not only the appropriate data but an appropriate analysis of it. Finally, the scholar must then provide a compelling interpretation of the results to justify the contribution of the thesis.

We will spend a couple of initial weeks trying to get an overview of the research process as whole. We will discuss theory building, descriptive and causal inference, reliability, validity, and other factors that scholars must grapple with regardless of the research design they ultimately employ.

Subsequent weeks will be spent reading about specific research designs, reading examples of works that employ that design, discussing their pros and cons, and then completing exercises that call for you to utilize what you know about the design. Roughly speaking, the designs will be ordered by the amount of control that the research has over the data-generating process.

This class is designed to encourage you to work steadily during the course of the semester. To do well 1) keep up with the readings, 2) come to class every day, 3) take good notes, 4) participate in the discussions, 5) seek out assistance at the first sign of difficulty, and 6) start preparing for known due dates as early as possible. If you shirk the regular reading assignments and class attendance or try to cram your work into short time periods, you will probably have a difficult time.

Readings:

There is one required book for the course.

de Vaus, David. 2001. *Research Design in Social Research*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Readings beyond those from the de Vaus text will be provided via blackboard.

The Team:

I have the good fortune of being assisted by Mr. Patrick Cunha (pcunhasilva@wustl.edu), a graduate student in our Ph.D. program. He will help me prepare lecture materials, develop assignments, and evaluate your work.

Tasks:

You must keep up with the reading assignments, and they are detailed below. Readings and class discussions will often be quite distinct — so, one cannot be substituted for the other. From week to week, readings will vary in their length and their "density". So, do not leave the readings to the last minute unless you have already gauged the challenge they will pose.

Participation (25% of your final grade)

I strongly encourage you to participate during class. I would like to lecture as little as possible. Of course, you have to be here to participate, and missing one class in this format is the same as missing a week's worth of classes in any other format. Don't hesitate to ask questions or to offer relevant points of observation.

Problem Sets and In-Class Exercises (35% of your final grade)
We have several problem sets and in-class activities (and perhaps occasional out-of-class activities) planned for the semester, and your successful completion of these will be essential. Each one will be designed to give you hands-on experience in dealing with some concrete aspect of the research (and publication) process.

Research Design (40% of your final grade)
Select a problem or puzzle that is amenable to empirical investigation and write a formal proposal for studying this question. Choose any topic of interest to you, but it must be "political". Think ahead. Most, if not all of you, have major research papers as part of your degree requirements, and this assignment should be seen as an opportunity to do the groundwork for such an effort – even as a precursor to your thesis.

In writing your proposal, take care to relate the readings and lectures to your specific project. While not an exhaustive list, be sure to consider the elements below in your design:
a. Make sure the research question is stated clearly. Define and develop all the concepts involved, including consideration of the values the concepts can take across time and place. Be explicit about the hypothesized relationships among the variables you include (theory!).
b. Briefly review the existing literature, especially in regard to the research designs employed.
c. Explain very carefully how you will move from conceptual dimensions to concrete indicators — operationalization. Why are these good indicators and what are their possible pitfalls? Discuss their reliability and validity.
d. What is your unit of analysis and how will you choose your cases? Given this sample, how generalizable will your findings be?
e. Where will you find the indicators of your concepts? What or who will be your sources and how will you gather your data? Be sure to explore the reliability and validity issues inherent in your data gathering techniques.
f. Describe how you would anticipate analyzing such data once it is collected.

Remember, this is a formal <u>proposal</u> for research. You will not do the actual data collection nor the data analysis (though you are welcome to). However, you will have to show that what you propose would be realistic for a senior thesis. Assume that you will be submitting this proposal to a potential faculty advisor and that you are trying to impress that person sufficiently that he or she is willing to invest the time necessary to be your mentor. Be thorough and anticipate any criticisms of your proposal knowing that the final product will be evaluated by multiple readers who are experts in your field.

Proper documentation in the current APSA style is required. The final proposal should not exceed approximately 20 double-spaced pages (1" margins, ≥ 10 pt. font, etc.). A complete, polished draft is due Monday, April 30. Time permitting, we will schedule an opportunity for each of you to give a 15 minute presentation of your research design and to field questions about it from the your peers, Patrick, and me for approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

This is a very demanding assignment (and it is worth a relatively large portion of your final grade). I strongly recommend that you start on it early in the semester. Create some interim deadlines for yourself. Share those deadlines with me, and I will try to help you keep meeting them.

<u>Additional Policies:</u>
Please read these additional policies carefully. They will govern various aspects of how the class will function this semester.

One-on-One Consultation. I strongly encourage you to stop by frequently to see me about the course. Just send me an e-mail, and we will find a mutually convenient time to get together. Staying engaged with the course materials and getting informal feedback at regular intervals will have a big impact on your performance on the required assignments.

Due Dates. Due dates are detailed in the syllabus or will be expressed to you in class. If you foresee a conflict with some due date, see me immediately to talk about options, if I can offer any. I do not grant last-minute exceptions, and I will penalize any late work severely.

Technology. Turn off your smartphone, tablet, laptop, etc. when you enter the room. Put it out of your own sight and out of mine. Exceptions will be made as part of in-class exercises. Students who are repeatedly disruptive to my train of thought or to the focus of their fellow students will be administratively dropped from the course.

Special Accommodations. If you require any, set up a time to meet with me early in the semester so that I can make sure your needs are met.

Academic Integrity. Plagiarism, cheating, misrepresenting one's identity, etc. will not be tolerated. Please review the university's policies in this regard at: http://www.wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

WEDNESDAY 1/17 – Course Logistics

WEDNESDAY 1/24 – Theory Building, Descriptive Inference, and Causal Inference
Kellstedt and Whitten 1-143

WEDNESDAY 1/31 – Some More on Causality and An Overview of Research Designs, and Effective Research
Gerring 197-255
de Vaus 1-52
Kellstedt and Whitten 273-293

WEDNESDAY 2/7 – Experimental Designs: Lab & Field
de Vaus 53-112
Morton and Williams 31-100
Habyarimana et al 709-725

WEDNESDAY 2/14 – Experimental Designs: Lab & Field
Grose 355-370
Hyde 403-424
Rooij et al. 389-395
Grossman and Baldassarri 964-985

WEDNESDAY 2/21 – Survey Experiments
Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 1-20
Meng, Pan, and Yang 399-433
Hainmueller and Hiscox 61-84

WEDNESDAY 2/28 – Natural Experiments: Regression Discontinuity, Instrumental Variables, Difference in Differences
Dunning 1-102
Posner 529-545

WEDNESDAY 3/7 – Natural Experiments: Regression Discontinuity, Instrumental Variables, Difference in Differences
Angrist and Pischke 222-248
Crisp and Demirkaya
Montalvo 1146-1154

SPRING BREAK

WEDNESDAY 3/21 – Quasi-Experiment: Statistical matching, Synthetic controls, Interrupted time series
Pape 343-361
Gilligan and Sergenti 89-122
Gordon and Huber 107-138

WEDNESDAY 3/28 – Quasi-Experiment: Statistical matching, Synthetic controls, Interrupted time series
Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 495-510
Harden and Kirkland 119-152
Bilgel and Can Karhasan 457-479

WEDNESDAY 4/4 – Large-N Observational: Time-Series, Cross-Sectional, Pooled Time-Series
De Vaus 113-169
Huber 101-113
Scheve and Stasavage 1-22

WEDNESDAY 4/11 – Large-N Observational: Time-Series, Cross-Sectional, Pooled Time-Series
De Vaus 170-218
Crisp, Brian F., Betul Demirkaya, Leslie Schwindt-Bayer, and Courtney Millian. 2018. "The Role of Rules in Representation: Group Membership and Electoral Incentives." *British Journal of Political Science.* 48: 47-67.
Olivella, Santiago, Kristin Kanthak, and Brian F. Crisp. 2017. ". . . And Keep Your Enemies Closer: Building Reputations for Facing Electoral Challenges." *Electoral Studies*. 46: 75-86.
Crisp, Brian F., and Amanda Driscoll. 2012. "The Strategic Use of Legislative Voting Procedures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37(1): 67-97.

WEDNESDAY 4/18 – Presentations

WEDNESDAY 4/25 – Small-N Observational: Interviews, Focus Groups, Ethnography, Case Studies
De Vaus 219-266