Instructor: Kevin Simmt
Contact: ksimmt@iit.edu
Time & Location: Wed 10:00-12:40PM via Zoom
Office Hours: Wed 1-2PM; Thu 11:15-12PM via Zoom

Course Description

The world does not always present us the data we need to answer the questions we have. When this happens, it is upon you to "go out and get it." When it comes to the social sciences, this may requiring going to a physical location in which the information is embedded – potentially within the people who are there.

The study of fieldwork exists as an applied branch of research methods. Crucially, when a social scientist want to answer a question, they must build a research design; those educated in fieldwork have access to a host of tools that their research design might leverage.

In our class, we will often "go back to the basics," by asking what makes for a strong research design: "how do I design my research such that I am confident my (eventual) answer is actually the correct answer to my question." Once a strong research design is established, then the effective fieldwork methods may be considered. Hence, with the basics of responsible research design in mind, we may become a "applied social scientists" – the strong technical skill set in field methods may now be applied.

In this class, we review the tools at our disposal to glean information from physical environment – and people in those environments – in such a manner as to help us to answer research questions. (Mostly, learning from our environment is a reference to "getting information outta people," but it can also reference learning about about the how the particulars of a place carry their own independent effects.

This will lead us to studying many tools including, but not limited to, interviewing, survey methods, ethnography and field-experiments.

Students need not be social scientists, but ought to think like social scientists on a humanistic mission in order to get the most out of this class: "what unanswered problems exist out there, to which an answer might lead to people living better lives?" Notably, the subject matter of your research may be from any number of disciplines, but the answers to your question ought to focus on how best (i.e., accurately) to extract information from people and places in a manner that leads you to having high levels of confidence in the answers you purport to your research questions.

University Description

This course is designed to provide students with the opportunity to work on a real-world project that is or will be taking place "in the field."

Is this Course Right For Me? What to Expect...

A syllabus should help students make an informed decision in their course-selection during the "shopping period." As such, I wish to use the syllabus as an opportunity to review both the costs and benefits of engaging in this course.

I should begin by noting that the course is, at times, "reading-heavy." Part of the course's objective is to help teach you how to do vast amounts of reading. Of course, this will almost certainly not be to everyone's liking – but, as I said earlier, the syllabus is my place to issue fair warning before the course-drop deadline.

Additionally, please note that lectures in this course are particularly important. The readings make many enticing arguments but the course must, ultimately, focus on relatively few of them. Student may, of course, look to the lecture notes; however, they are intended to be skeletal. Without the aid of lecture, it will be difficult to focus your efforts in the readings; but also difficult to extract sufficient knowledge from the slide decks alone. Moreover, the learning value of many class activities resides in one's active participation. So, please, intend to regularly, and actively, partake in lectures. (Indeed, in this course much of your grade will be derived from participation and presenting.)

I should mention that my work in comparative politics is heavily-laden with research design and quantitative analysis. While I do not assume students to have any background knowledge on either subject, I will be teaching many of their basic intuitions. Any with phobias of these topics should be content with the idea of making good use of office hours.

Teaching Philosophy

Shortly, I will speak to many benefits of studying the fieldwork (regardless of the particular instructor). Beforehand, I wish to mention the idiosyncratic added-value of *my course* on comparative public policy, which, I believe, derives from the two teaching philosophies on which it is built.

First, while the class is largely structured, I abide David Foster Wallace's maxim: "We can talk about whatever you wish to - provided that we do it cogently and well." In other words, as much as this class is about comparative politics, you will find many opportunities to twist coursework towards better understanding social issues that you care about - *provided that* you (a) do it well and (b) successfully relate the issue to comparative politics. Indeed, I wish to stress that as much as we talk comparative politics, students enrolling in this course must be aware we will also be talking a lot of public policy and public economics (again, if this is not for you, I encourage you to check-out the online offering).

Second, this course is not, *per se*, about collecting an encyclopedic knowledge of social scientific knowledge detached from purpose. I strive not to be a teacher of trivia. Rather, as social scientists we want to understand when "the particular" of a society implicates good

(or bad) consequences upon human welfare. Moreover, we want to understand how to test our theories of when a good (or bad) outcome is due to a particular feature that might be tweaked.

We must, of course, study the "trivia," but as a means rather than an end. We are, ultimately, upon a humanistic project to disentangle which features of a society are primary in determining social outcomes. In some cases, we find aspects of society that might be manipulated so as to build a better society and, in yet other cases, we discover that an aspect of society (i) is beyond manipulation; (ii) has non-constant effects upon manipulation (i.e., the mediating effects of unique context); and/or (iii) has the potential to be manipulated to solve one problem but, in turn, will trigger a watershed of other problems. In all of this, we must be confident in our findings – and that is where research design becomes our focal point.

Learning Objectives

The course is designed to:

- 1) Build theoretical knowledge of sound research design and fieldwork methods; in addition to confidence practically applying these capacities in the field

- 2) Build your skills to understand social scientific claims critically and to converse constructively about them

- 3) Develop abilities to think critically about complex problems and communicate your thoughts clearly through analytical papers and discussion

- 4) Capacity to critically assess arguments, from the media and academia, in order to test them for weaknesses of logic and/or research design

- 5) Communicate complex ideas simply; become practiced in respectful debate and confident in your own voice

- 6) Create evidence-based support for your theories seeking to explain social scientific phenomenon

Class Structure

Each week students will be responsible to cover the readings listed in the syllabus; additionally, they may have recorded lecture materials to watch; and, lastly, they will be expected at our "live" meetings over Zoom, every Wednesday.

Predictably, each session of the course will focus on an aspect of fieldwork, but most weeks will also have a foray into a topic in the more fundamental topic of research design.

Do not count on the "slide deck" as being comprehensive. I prefer a traditional lecturing style. I also like including what we learn from discussion in the exams.

While I have a fixed set of material for each day, plenty of time is available for questions/commentary. You should not be shy of speaking up. In fact, past experience tells me

that often the most learning occurs when impromptu - sometimes intense - debates breakout. Interruption, so long as tactful, is encouraged.

Course Readings

Many readings for this course will be posted on Blackboard. We will, however, also rely heavily upon the following textbook, which is available for purcahse:

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. Field research in political science: Practices and principles. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Assessment:

I consistently ask for deliverables, which amounts to much work; however, I hope this relieves pressure from preforming well on any one dimension. Deadlines are listed in the weekly schedule below (and on Blackboard). With exception of a variety of in-class participation activities, all work is submitted over Blackboard. Work will include:

- 10 Participation in Student-Led Discussion (10 x 1% each)

- 1 Seminar Leader Participation (10%)

- 1 Midterm Exam (15%)

- 1 Final Exam (15%)

- 5 Major Research Project "Checkpoints" (5 x 2% each)

- 1 Major Research Project (30%)

- 1 Major Research Project Presentation & Participation (10%)

Note that active participation is more than simply attending. Students are expected to be prepared to discuss the assigned reading as outlined below. In general, "strong" answers (on exams, assignments, etc.) will include an explanation of the phenomena described, not just a description. They will also include social scientific variables in their explanations.

Finally, "please note, the IIT student handbook indicates that all students are expected to attend classes regularly and that excessive absences may be grounds for a failing grade. If you must miss a class, please contact the instructor." A make-up for participation will be offered in the form of a short report on the week's material and a check-in will be offered to allow you to ask questions on material missed.

Graded Work: Item-by-Item Overview

Participation in Student-Led Discussion (10 x 1%):

Attend and actively participate in ten of your peer's presentations; your grade is based on your 10 best scores out of all classes (meaning, you needn't participate every class). This is done on purpose to (i) account for the fact we may not always have time for everyone to chime in; and (ii) create leniency in case of emergencies arising that take you out of class. Students are expected to demonstrate a working understanding of the materials assigned by their peers.

Students unable to attend (for documented reasons) may communicate with me directly – via email or zoom – to help me understand their level of knowledge acquisition. In such a case, students must contact me directly and I will provide them with a series of prompts. By answering, participation can be earned.

Seminar Leader (1 x 10%)

Lead the class in a discussion on a paper (of your choice!) about either a fieldwork method or natural experiment. This assignment requires that you: (1) briefly present on the subject (5-10 min); (2) lead a discussion amongst your peers; and (3) exercise judgement in selecting a short reading relevant to your audience.

Midterm Exam (1 x 15%)

The midterm exam will test all material that has been taught up to, but not including, the week of the exam. A variety of test instruments will be used, including mini-essays (generally requiring you to say what you think of a subject, not merely recite what you know of a subject), short answer (generally definitional), multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, matching, true/false, etc.

Final Exam (1 x 15%)

The final exam will test all material that has been taught up in the course – including materials covered by the midterm (knowledge is cumulative, after all). A variety of test instruments will be used, include mini-essays (generally requiring you to say what you think of a subject, not merely recite what you know of a subject), short answer (generally definitional), multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, matching, true/false, etc.

Major Research Project "Checkpoints" (5 x 2%)

Your major research project will be made more digestable by being split into small pieces. As such, students will be required to adhere deadlines to reach "checkpoints," along the way to final submission.

Final Assignment: Major Research Paper (1 x 30%)

Approx 1500-2500 Words. Select a research question that captivates you. Construct a theory. Then build a research design that will give you high confidence in the answer that you come to (whether it confirms or refutes your original theory, no matter!); crucially, your research design must use at least two of the major fieldwork techniques that we cover in the course. (This project is made more digestible by being split into small pieces. As such, students will be required to adhere deadlines to reach "checkpoints," along the way to final submission.)

Policy Presentation & Participation (1 x 10%)

This component will require that you: (i) workshop your paper to a subset of your peers; (ii) advise your peers when they workshop their papers; (iii) present briefly on your final research paper; (iv) lead a short discussion / Q&A to defend your proposal; and (v) participate in the presentations of your peers.

FIXED DEADLINES

Please note that these deadlines do not include activities for which you select the date of participation (e.g., presentations).

- Major Research Project: Checkpoint 1 – **Jan 26**

- Major Research Project: Checkpoint 2 – **Feb 9**

- Major Research Project: Checkpoint 3 – **Feb 23**

- Midterm Exam (Issued Mar 2) – **Mar 6**

- Major Research Project: Checkpoint 4 – **Mar 9**

- Major Research Project: Checkpoint 5 – **March 23**

- Final Major Research Project – **Apr 27**

- Final Exam (Issued Apr 27) – **May 1**

Academic Misconduct

The follow section quotes University policy, ad naseum... "Academic Integrity: Work done for this course must adhere to the University Academic Integrity Policy. If you are unfamiliar with the Universitys academic integrity standards please visit: **https://www.iit.edu/student-affairs/student-handbook/fine-print/code-academic-honesty**

Students in this course, and in all courses where independent research and writing play a vital role in the requirements, must be aware of the strong sanctions carried out as a result of plagiarism, as stated in IIT student affairs handbook. Additionally, advice on plagarism and

how to avoid it may be found here: **https://www.iit.edu/cac/writing-guides/writing-process/plagiarism-and-avoiding-it**

Violations of academic integrity include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources-alteration or falsification of academic records; academic misconduct; and complicity. Cheating is any action that violates University norms or instructor's guidelines for the preparation and submission of assignments. This includes but is not limited to unauthorized access to examination materials prior to the examination itself, use or possession of unauthorized materials during the examination or quiz; having someone take an examination in one's placecopying from another student; and unauthorized assistance. Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

The direct copying of any source, such as written and oral material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement. Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Academic dishonesty will automatically result in a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Department of Social Sciences academic integrity committee, the IIT Academic Integrity Office and the Dean of the Lewis College. All work submitted in this course must be original. Submitting work from another class without explicit instructor permission will result in a failing grade for the course."

Deadlines and Late Penalities

Meeting deadlines in this course is essential (the assignments are all relatively short – or built-up from small pieces – and, thus, I do not think this demand is unreasonable). Because we will talk about your written work during the class for which it is due, you become "dead weight" if you fail to complete on time.

As such, late work penalized 10% per day if late, UNLESS valid documentation has been presented to the instructor *in advance of the deadline*. True emergencies, with proper documentation, may be sorted after the fact.

Note, if technical issues arise submitting on Blackboard, then simply email me your work before the deadline. Additionally, you are responsible for submitting a functioning Word or PDF file. Manage your time such that you may inspect your work for technical glitches.

Using Blackboard

In addition to the required reading, you will find other useful information on Blackboard, such as a current copy of the syllabus, information about assignments and exams, class

readings, and your grades. I use the announcements feature on Blackboard to communicate important information about the coursemake sure that you check these regularly or that you receive the notification emails for new announcements. For each class, I will also post the Powerpoint slides after the lecture to the 'Modules' tab.

Disability

Center for Disability Resources: Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. In order to receive accommodations, students must obtain a letter of accommodation from the Center for Disability Resources. The Center for Disability Resources (CDR) is located at 10 West 35th Street, telephone 312.567.5744 [312.567.5135 (tdd)] or disabilities@iit.edu.

I will strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options.

Do not fail to remember, there are always helpers. You may talk to me – if life feels off – and I will do my out-most to help you manage your workload and build a strategy to complete your work in manageable pieces. In an emergency situation, 24 hour help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Academic Resources

The University has many resources available for students. The Writing Center offers free help with writing at any stage of the writing process for any member of the university community. During sessions, consultants can work with you on anything from research papers to lab reports, from dissertations to rsums, from proposals to application materials. Appointments are available via the Writing Center website:

- https://www.iit.edu/humanities/student-resources/writing-center

Course Schedule: Daily Topics, Readings & Deliverables

Please abide the following schedule. It is very important, in this class, to keep pace. If you are struggling with the pace, be certain to contact me. We will find ways to make sure you can cover the material through extra guidance in office hours.

Note that any given week will have a mix of "live" meetings (synchronous lecture); some pre-recorded materials (asynchronous lecture); and readings. Students are responsible for acquiring the knowledge from each of these sources.

Session		Topics/Deadlines	Readings
Wed 1/12	1	Introduction	Syllabus* Seven Fallen Feathers [Excerpt]
Wed 1/19	2	Introducing Field Research	Syllabus* Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH1 Lieberman, Howard & Lynch. "Symposium: Field Research,"
Wed 1/26	3	Research Design | Prepping for the Field *Due Date: Check-Point I*	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH3 Hertel, "Field Research in Developing Countries: Hitting the Road Running" Angrist CH1 The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi
Wed 2/02	4	Natural Experiments | Managing the Field	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH4 Angrist CH2 Dunning, Natural Experiments in the Social Scientists, CH1 Democracy, Redistribution, and Political Participation: Evidence From Sweden 1919–1938
Wed 2/09	5	Case Selection | Active Discovery in the Field *Due Date: Check-Point II*	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH5 Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get"
Wed 2/16	6	Interview Methods	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH6 + Appendix Martin "Crafting Interviews to Capture Cause and Effect" Leetch, "Techniques for Semi-Structured Interviews" in Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science Pinderhughes, "The Anatomy of Racially Motivated Violence in New York City: A Case Study of Youth in Southern Brooklyn"

Session		Topics/Deadlines	Readings
Wed 2/23	7	Ethnography *Due Date:* *Check-Point III*	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH7 Geertz, "Thick Description"
Wed 3/02	8	Surveying **Midterm Issued**	Krosnick & Presser, "Question and Questionnaire Design" Keeter, Scott. 2005. "Survey Research." **Midterm Exam: DUE March 6**
Wed 3/09	9	Experiments | Applied Introduction to Causal Inference *Due Date:* *Check-Point VI*	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH9 Lab-in-the-Field Experiments at https://www.dropbox.com/s/0eaebq403pozlec/APSA_Newletter_Fall2011.pdf?dl=0 Chetty, "Taxation Salience" "Social Esteem and Participation in Contentious Politics: A Field Experiment at an LGBT Rights Rally."
Wed 3/16	10	Spring Break	
Wed 3/23	11	Analysis of Findings | Effective Writing *Due Date:* *Check-Point V*	Kapiszewski Et. Al, CH10 Palluck, "The Promising Integration of Qualitative Methods and Field Experiments" Hainmueller, "Attitudes Toward Highly Skilled and Low-Skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment"
Wed 3/30	12	Research Workshop	
Wed 4/06	13	Research Workshop	
Wed 4/13	14	**Review: Final Exam Issued**	In-Class Practical Training
Wed 4/20	15	Presentations	
Wed 4/27	16	Presentations	**Major Research Paper: DUE April 27** **Final Exam: DUE May 1**