

Capstone Research Seminar

(GLOA 720, Spring 2023)

classroom: [Horizon 4000](#) 

Global Affairs Program, George Mason University

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1. INSTRUCTOR

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- Profile: 🎓 [GoogleScholar](#) 🏠 [GLOA](#) 🏠 [Webpage](#)
- Office: [Horizon Hall 6235](#) 📍
- Office Hours: MT 1:30–3:00
 - Zoom-in during this time is also available ([link](#)). Drop me an email, though, at least 2 hours in advance before Zooming in. Emails are **strongly** preferred to Zoom.
 - I will also make myself available for a bit *before* and *after* the class. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of that time.
- Email Policies
 - you can email me whenever you want, but my responses to the emails sent to me after 5 pm weekdays as well as any time during the weekend will be *significantly* slow. For best responses, you might want to try to use the normal working hours (9 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday).
 - in your email, please indicate 1) who you are (name) and 2) which class you're in (i.e., GLOA 720).
 - **online security**: Use *only* the Mason email for any communication to [protect your privacy](#). This is a very strict GMU rule—which is also based on a federal law. But most importantly, this is a smart thing to do. Emails from a non-Mason account, even when looking 'innocent,' won't be answered (though I try to reply back saying 'send it again using your Mason account'). If you are not getting my response to your email for a long time, first check if you sent it from your Mason account.

2. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Capstone Research Seminar offers an opportunity for GLOA MA students to draw upon the different skills and bodies of knowledge acquired and honed during the course MA studies. The goal is to prepare the students to operate professionally in a complex global environment that requires a range of analytical skills. We tap into your previous coursework which has so far trained you to think critically of your own orientations, worldview, and presuppositions. In this class, you will apply them to a specific research project of your choice. While we start out talking extensively about social science research methods, the course is not a research methods course. Nor is it a 'repeat of GLOA 605'. Rather it sets out to explore ways in which we can link theories and concepts to methods in order to generate new knowledge and persuasive arguments. The underlying assumption is that in order to operate effectively in a global age, we need to know not only how to produce knowledge and arguments but also assess and evaluate those made by others, their (implicit or explicit) presuppositions, blind spots, and understandings. The frequent presentations as well as peer-review assignments are to incorporate these assumptions into an effective learning process. As such, this seminar is not to turn you into an academic. Instead, it is a collective learning experience focusing on analytical speaking, writing, and communications. All those efforts will be reflected in your final outcome of the class, a **capstone research paper**.

3. COURSE REQUIREMENT

1. Readings

- Completing all the required readings is only a minimal requirement for a graduate seminar. In this capstone, we will have most of the readings at the first half of the semester.
- Our discussions will be firmly anchored to the readings as well as people's research projects. Particular attention is given to the research methods employed.
- *Recommended* readings are by definition not required. They are something you can tap into to dig deeper, particularly when you are interested in the subject.
- there is no textbook you need to purchase. Instead, the reading list for each week is specified below. Most of them are electronically available via GMU library webpage (as well as in).
 - this is part of training; I will be more than happy to help if necessary.
 - the readings you cannot access electronically will be made available on Blackboard.
- when we don't meet in person, there is no required reading.

2. Participation (20%)

- active participation in class discussions is expected of every student in this graduate seminar. As is the case in any seminar, we learn the most when we talk. More so in this course as you are expected to be able to comment, critique, and help improve other people's work (professional communication). Any communication in class discussion counts, but those on your classmates' work are considered particularly valuable.
- the evaluation on your participation rests upon my subjective assessment of the extent to which you contributed to our collective understanding of the class subject. In practical terms, both frequency and quality matter. There's no 'right' way of participation, but roughly speaking:

	20-19.0	18.9-15.0		14.9-12.0	11.9-0
frequency	high	not high	high	not high	<i>missed many classes</i>
quality	high	high	not high	not high	

3. Capstone Research (80%)

The capstone research is consists the following:

- A. pitching the idea (5%)
- B. literature review (with a rudimentary intro and argument, 20%)
- C. presentation of the research (10%)
- D. two rounds of peer-reviews of others' research (5% each = 10%)
- E. the actual paper (35%)

3.1. The pitch (5%), 2/8 and 2/15

It is important to emphasize that none of you start this class empty-handed. You already have a topic of your interest if you have taken many classes including GLOA 605 and 610 where you were asked to produce a certain kind of research project. Okay, sometimes you are not very enthusiastic

about it anymore, but that's fine but unless you hate it too much, you are advised *against* picking up a whole new research topic that you've never worked on before. Please note, however, this is not to ask you to recycle your previous class paper. The point is to go through the whole process of research. You will choose your topic and you will pitch it to the class to see if it's a doable one. The **DOABILITY** is the keyword here.

One important thing to think about is how concrete, as opposed to general, your topic is. You are giving the pitch on **2/6** or **2/13**. You will be given feedback and suggestions from me and your classmates. It is perfectly fine if you're lost or unsure about the topic. Just say that you are lost and let us collectively figure things out for you. But even then give us some clues to what interests you. So you **don't** consult me on your topic before the pitch. You can, after the pitch. In the pitch, you are expected to provide:

- **research question:** Your research question should be related to at least some of the following questions: What is the question(s) that can be answered by your paper? What kind of people do you think should read your capstone paper? What kind of news stories, if any, motivates your project? This will determine how 'important' and/or 'interesting' your research is.
- **topic:** While tapping on the topic you might already have, there are some conditions/restrictions. The topic should be global, meaning that a certain portion of your research—e.g., actor, framework, or data—should 'cross a border.' You, a student in the United States, studying any of the global regions (even Canada!) should satisfy this condition. A purely American subject, in other words, needs to be avoided. Again, try not to be general. Be specific. The topic should be *very* concrete. An easy, but definitely not the only, way to satisfy this condition is to focus on a specific policy of a country and to *evaluate* it—'did it succeed or fail? Why?'
- **method & data:** What kind of method would you use? You have a large swath of empirical methods in your pocket as you've taken 605 as well as other graduate-level courses. So think about what you can utilize. In so doing, you will invariably think about the data. Is it interview data? Participatory observation? Comparative case studies? Process tracing? Surveys? Archives? Content-discourse? Social media? Second-hand historical data? Or, most likely, some combinations of these? Whatever that is, tell us what you envision is a good way to get the business done. There's no 'right' method; there are ones that make your project doable/(un)doable. Choose a method that you are already familiar with. **Something you can actually implement.**
- **tentative argument/conclusion** (optional): You haven't done your empirical analysis yet and the argument has not been formed (probably). But if you have a vague idea as to what kind of argument you want to have or a conclusion you think you will be arriving at, just talk about it.

The pitch is your opportunity to get early feedback on your research, so take advantage of it. But also be honest about where you are, what you have, and what you're unsure of. Use it to your favor. You pitch itself will not be longer than five minutes. But we will discuss your pitch and try to help you with that, which then can take 10 minutes. Be prepared to answer people's questions. *If you give a pitch on a scheduled date, you will have the whole 5%.* Others are expected to give constructive feedback and suggestions. Start working on the pitch as early as possible.

3.2. The literature review (20%): 7:00PM, 3/6

The general format of a research paper will be:

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Theory and/or Argument
4. Empirical Analysis
5. Conclusion

(for general instruction on how to write a research paper, see <https://youtu.be/h-JuMI9bUF4>.) You are expected to turn in a mostly-finished **Literature Review** of your paper as well as rudimentary **Introduction** and **Theory and/or Argument** by (7:00 PM, 3/6). We will discuss what each of these is in the first several weeks. In the literature review:

- include at least six academic sources (narrowly defined, such as academic books or peer-reviewed journal articles). You are also encouraged to use non-academic sources as much as you want including policy reports, blog posts, news or magazine articles, but they don't count towards the 6 academic sources requirement.
- highlight the contribution of your paper to the literature. This doesn't have to be (or probably should not be) something grandiose. Small things like '*few people talked about X in country Y's context*' is just fine. The important part here is to demonstrate 'few people.' We will discuss this in much more detail in class.

3.3. Peer Review (5% each, 10% in total)

You will submit two written reviews, each of which highlights two of your classmates' work: 1) *two pitches* and 2) *two presentations*. Use the form in Blackboard. There's no length limit or maximum, but try to be helpful and polite. Complete the form and upload it in Blackboard no later than 7:00 PM, **Tuesday** of the week right after the pitches and presentations (i.e., about 24 hours after the pitch/presentation). You will be a designated reviewer of two of your classmates. Refer to the list in Blackboard (to be posted later) to see whose work you're reviewing. Try to give verbal, live feedback in the classroom, which then will help you write the review.

3.4. One-on-One (not graded)

You will have a one-on-one zoom session (no longer than 30 minutes) in the weeks of 3/27, and 4/3. We are going to discuss your project with a particular focus on your literature review and how to go forward. It is perfectly normal that the session ends up very short, particularly when you're on a right track. A sign-up sheet will be made available when we approach it.

3.5. Presentation (10%)

By early-to-mid April, I expect that you are completing your empirical analysis, although it is not quite written out entirely. This is a critical juncture where you need feedback both from your peers as well as from me. Are you interpreting the data right? Does what your empirical analysis presents actually support your argument? Do you need a follow-up interview with a particular interviewee? These things are important questions to ask and are usually pretty hard to answer all by yourself. So present your all-but-not-written research. Some presentation spots will be quite early and some quite late. There are pros and cons. The earlier you present, the more time you can actually incorporate the feedback you receive into your paper. But if you are nowhere near implementing your empirical analysis, probably you might not be able to present your research. The later you present, the more time you get to work on it. But you might have little time to incorporate the feedback into your writing, which is important. Make your own decision on this.

A sign-up sheet will be made available when we approach this period. In the presentation, include the following:

- the primary argument (or hypothesis)
- the findings from the empirical analysis
- tentative conclusion

Make the presentation no longer than 10 minutes. Slides are neither required nor prohibited. Take the format that best suits your narrative.

3.6. The paper (35%), due 7:00 PM, 5/8

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Theory and/or Argument
4. Empirical Analysis
5. Conclusion

You will have all five parts of a research paper in your final paper. Since by this time, you will already have the literature review (and rudimentary and theory) completed and the empirical analysis will be the major addition at this stage. Unlike a research design or proposal, you are actually implementing an empirical analysis. **Don't wait until the literature review is completed. Start working on your empirical analysis as early as possible.** You will go through books, articles and/or archives to do a historical case study; you will do (virtual) interviews of people; you will spend quite some time in a subreddit to collect data (quotes and discussions) for a discourse analysis; or you will run a survey (your classmates) using Qualtrics. You will implement an actual empirical analysis. Several things to keep in mind:

- *We all pitch in for surveys.* The primary target population for the survey (if, and only if, you use one) will be the class. **Everybody is obligated to promptly complete a survey that any of your classmates distributes.**
- *Doability.* I will say it again. Choose what is doable. If you haven't, for example, taken any quantitative method class already, using a quantitative method is not a good idea. If you don't know much about drug lords other than several Netflix shows (like myself), working on trans-border drug trafficking would not be a good idea as finding data is challenging. Pick something you are already familiar with. Go back to your undergraduate or 605 or 610 projects. Remember, the goal is to produce, to go through the *whole* process research, not to become a Nobel laureate.

4. COURSE POLICY

1. Assignment Submission

- All assignments are expected to be submitted electronically in Blackboard ('Assignment Submission' tab).
- Technical difficulties are not rare. Try to submit it early if you can.

- Be sure to make it a **MS Word or PDF** file. Absolutely NO Pages file (things become complicated in Blackboard if you submit a Pages file 🙄).
- For all details (e.g., citation styles), strictly adhere to the GLOA MA Student Guide. If you repeatedly and consistently violate citation styles, some, though a small amount, points will be taken off.
 - Why do we care about formatting (and perhaps proofreading)? Because it has real-life consequences. [Research](#) has shown that people read a lot from basic mistakes in easy-to-correct things.
- **2%** reduction in grade will be applied to a same-day late submission (so it is still a good idea to turn things in no later than the day of the deadline—the damage would be minimal!). Additional **5%** reduction will be added for every midnight (11:59 pm) until the submission.

2. Co-working Policy

Publication is one of the most frequently cited indicators of scholarly excellence and therefore an integral part of any graduate education. As a graduate student, getting your work published in a journal, be it professional or academic, is challenging for a variety of reasons. Many students therefore opt for co-working on a manuscript with professors. Co-working policies may vary among professors, mine is simple; 1) the one who initiates (either a student(s) or myself) is responsible for providing reasonable evidence that the project is doable and appealing to the target audience and 2) the one who contributed most to the completion of the projects gets the first authorship.

3. Accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) Make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 222; 993-2474; www.gmu.edu/student/drc) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) Talk with me to plan your accommodation needs. Covid-19 Disability Service Update: <https://ds.gmu.edu/response-to-covid-19/>.

4. Academic Integrity

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. When you rely on someone else's work, you will give that source full credit, typically in the form of an in-text citation and bibliographic reference. If you are unaware of what counts as plagiarism see here:

<http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>.

Students caught violating the Honor Code will receive a failing grade in this course and will be reported to the proper university authorities for further disciplinary action.

5. Diversity Statement

* this section reflects in part [Mason's diversity statement](#).

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding

growth and productivity among its students, faculty, and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services, and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

There's a practical element here too. You (will) live in an increasingly diverse society where practicing inclusiveness might help you in the long run (even if you do not agree with some of these values!). You are strongly encouraged to check out important websites such as [Anti-Racism Resources](#) and [GMU Religious Holiday Calendar](#). It is the obligation of the student to provide faculty, within the first two weeks of the semester, with the dates of major religious holidays on which they will be absent due to religious observances.

6. Grading Scale

total score	letter grade
≥ 93.00	A or A+
90.00 — 92.99	A-
87.00 — 89.99	B+
83.00 — 86.99	B
80.00 — 82.99	B-
60.00 — 79.99	C
< 59.99	F

This follows Mason's [official grading scale](#).

The class does not give 'T' (incomplete).

Please note here that there is no 'round up' of scores at the end of the semester. **92.99999**, for example, is A-.

CHSS strictly prohibits giving an extra assignment for the purpose of improving a grade.

7. Rubric (or the lack thereof)

There's is no hard rubric for the written assignments as there could be so many different ways to do a good work. Likewise, you usually do not 'lose' points because there was something wrong in your paper. Okay, you sometimes do but in essence, you 'earn' points. Good work earns you high points. Not-so-god work gets you not-so-high points. I can and will give you suggestions on your work regarding what could have done better and/or what kind of questions need to be answered but it is nearly impossible to put together a coherent rubric when there's just so many different ways to be good and there aren't necessarily 'right' and 'wrong' ways. Having said that, here's some expectation for a certain level of grades. The *concreteness* of your paper would explain the variation within the columns in the table below.

if total possible point = 20:	[20.0-19.0]	[18.9-17.0]	[16.9-13.0]	[12.9-10.0]
extraordinarily insightful analysis (“ <i>you made me cry</i> ”)	✓			
direct answer with relevant points (“ <i>there’s no major shortcoming</i> ”)	✓	✓		
proper format w/ reasonable clarity (“ <i>You are trying to make a point and I am confident that I understand it</i> ”)	✓	✓	✓	
meeting minimal requirements (“ <i>it takes a form of paper that talks about a relevant topic</i> ”)	✓	✓	✓	✓

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5. CLASS (READING) SCHEDULE

- * We mimic the schedule of a face-to-face version of this class. The dates provided below indicate the time when the lecture video is made available. It does NOT mean that you are supposed to watch the video on those dates. Remember, this is a *asynchronous* course.
- * Unless specified as ‘recommended,’ all the listed readings are required readings.
- * Readings and the reading schedules are subject to change.

1. 23. First Day. Introduction and Housekeeping

- No reading. But we will go over the syllabus and there’s a lot going on in this syllabus. So you are expected to read the syllabus in its entirety in advance for your own good.

1. 30. The Methods, a Primer

- King, G., Keohane, R. O., and Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. Ch. 1.
- Gerring, J. (2012). *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, second edition. Two chapters. Scanned PDFs will be made available in Blackboard.
- APA Style Guide. Purdue University (just for your reference) https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html.
- Steinberg, D. (2022). How voters respond to currency crises: Evidence from turkey. *Comparative Political Studies*, (55):1332–1365. (recommended)

2. 6. Pitch your idea (1)

- See Blackboard to see who's giving a pitch.

2. 13. Pitch your idea (2)

- See Blackboard to see who's giving a pitch.

2. 20. How *Not* to Write a Bad Literature Review

- Knopf, J. W. (2006). Doing a literature review. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(01):127–132.
- Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper. University of Southern California Libraries. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/purpose>: use the tabs on the left.
- The Literature Review: A Few Tips On Conducting It. University of Toronto. <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/literature-review/>.
- GMU resources: <https://infoguides.gmu.edu/litreview> (recommended)

2. 27. Method Recap 1: Case Studies, Historical Analysis, & Process Tracing

- George, A. L. and Bennett, A. (2006). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press, Cambridge. Chs. 3 & 5 (Blackboard) (Ch. 10 is recommended)
- Mahoney, J. (2004). Comparative-Historical Methodology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30:81–101.
- Steinberg, D. A. and Shih, V. C. (2012). Interest Group Influence in Authoritarian States: The Political Determinants of Chinese Exchange Rate Policy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 45(11):1405–1434.

3.6. Method Recap 2: Discourse Analysis & Social Media

- **Literature Review due (7:00 PM, Blackboard)**
- Klačnjak, M., Barberá, P., Beauchamp, N., Nagler, J., and Tucker, J. (2017). Measuring public opinion with social media data. In Atkeson, L. R. and Alvarez, R. M., editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*. Oxford University Press. (Blackboard)
- Chiluba, I. and Ifukor, P. (2015). 'War against our Children': Stance and evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls campaign discourse on Twitter and Facebook. *Discourse & Society*, 26(3):267–296.
- Bouvier, G. and Machin, D. (2018). Critical discourse analysis and the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Review of Communication*, 18(3):178–192.

3. 13. Spring Recess. No Class. 🦋

3. 20. Method Recap 3: Interview & Survey

- Jones, T., Baxter, M., and Khanduja, V. (2013). A quick guide to survey research. *The Annals of The Royal College of Surgeons of England*, 95(1):5–7.
- Qualtrics Beginner Tutorial: https://youtu.be/_hSo-ldj19k. (just for your reference)
- Leech, B. L. (2002). Asking questions: Techniques for semistructured interviews. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 35(4):665–668.
- Fujii, L. A. (2008). The Power of Local Ties: Popular Participation in the Rwandan Genocide. *Security Studies*, 17(3):568–597.

3. 27, 4. 3., and 4. 10. One-on-One meetings

- Sign-up will be made available when we approach this period.
- Each meeting lasts no more than 30 minutes.
- Other than the meetings, use these weeks as a secured writing time—you *will need it!*

4. 17. Presentation (1)

- Sign-up will be made available.

4. 24. Presentation (2)

- Sign-up will be made available.
- Upload the presentation video by 5:00 PM
- By 5:00 PM, Thursday, the designated reviewers are expected to provide feedback (at least three of them) by submitting a review form (available in Blackboard) as a ‘reply.’

5. 1. Presentation (3) and Wrap-up

- Sign-up will be made available.

5. 8. Final Paper Due 7:00 PM.