OBJECTIVES:

This course provides students with the basic tools for designing and researching rigorous research and policy papers in international relations M.A. programs. To this end it will provide answers to a few basic questions: How do you find and evaluate a good research puzzle? How do you write a good literature review and how do you use it to propose research hypotheses? How do you compare cases and how do you select them to extract maximum analytical leverage? How do you make causal and interpretive arguments? What do you need to know to do a good interview or carry out an online survey? What are the best ways to do an in-depth textual analysis? When do you use descriptive statistics and regression analysis and how do you interpret the results?

GRADING

x/100 points

General participation: 10. The grade is based on mastery of the readings as evident through participation in class discussions.

Research puzzle and hypotheses 5
Midterm: 20
Interview: 5
Online survey: 5
Content analysis: 10
Discourse analysis: 5
Presentations: 5
Experiment: 5
Final: 30
**Guidelines:** The midterm will be 3000 words, single-spaced, Baskerville without bibliography while the final will be 8000 words without bibliography.

The midterm will contain a research puzzle, the literature review and a section talking about the importance of your work. The final will be a research design paper. It will be based around the revised midterm but will consist mostly of detailed methodological sections, considerations of feasibility and structure of the thesis, chapter by chapter and section by section.

**ADMIN NOTES**

No laptops and mobile devices are allowed in class.

All work for this class is expected to be individual, i.e., not the result of collaboration or a group project. It is imperative that any and all sources used in papers be cited properly. Assigned papers will be submitted through the SafeAssign function on Blackboard, which screens for internet plagiarism. For guidance, see the guideline for source citation on page three of this syllabus and the GRS Academic Discipline Procedures (available at GRS or at http://www.bu.edu/grs/academics/resources/adp.html). Cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean’s office.

**READINGS:**

Students are required to complete all reading assignments before class. This is a working seminar, and discussions will require a thorough understanding of the readings.

The following required texts are required for the course. They will also be on reserve at the library.

- Gerring, 2011. Social Science Methodology (Cambridge)
- King, Keohane, & Verba (KKV), Designing Social Inquiry (Princeton)
- Van Evera, Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science (Cornell)
- Sprinz & Wolinsky, 2004. Models, numbers, and cases: methods for studying international relations (Michigan)

**ABSENCES AND LATE WORK:**

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to hand in assignments at the scheduled times, unless documentation is given excusing an absence for medical, religious or personal reasons, or for official university business. Every effort should be made to notify the instructor as soon as possible (preferably in advance) of the reason for the absence. Late papers will be penalized five (5) points for the first day late, and three (3) points each day thereafter.
COURSE OUTLINE

JANUARY 15 INTRODUCTION

JANUARY 22: WHAT’S SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND WHAT’S MERE OPINION?

Sprinz & Wolinsky Chapter 1

KKV pp. 3-33, 99-114

JANUARY 29: THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

KKV p 34-43

Imre Lakatos on falsification

http://www.csun.edu/~vcsoc00i/classes/s680f11/Lakatos.pdf


Presentations of three cases of falsification in social science research.

FEBRUARY 5: PUZZLES AND LITERATURE REVIEWS

Gerring, Ch. 2.


Assignment:

Each work team should prepare a research puzzle. A great way to frame a puzzle is to provide a representative quote, basic statistical data, a narrative overview, or short comparison.

FEBRUARY 12: HYPOTHESES AND THEORY CONSTRUCTION

Gerring 3-4

FEBRUARY 19: KEY CONCEPTS

Goertz, Social Science Concepts, chapters 1, 2, 3


FEBRUARY 26: CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Gerring Chapters 8-9


KKV, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 76-91.

Puzzle and hypotheses assignment: Describe a case (which might be a country, state, city, piece of legislation, party platform, group, individual, etc.) that you intend to use to trace historically and theorize how the independent variables will impact the dependent variables. How will you know when you find evidence for this causation? What might evidence look like, and how will you know when it is definitely not there? How will you use this case to understand the causal process and what might you be able to infer from a close examination of cases (e.g., supporting an argument or ruling out alternative explanations or both)?

MARCH 5: MIDTERM EXAM

MARCH 19: CASE STUDIES


Van Evera, 1997. “What are Case Studies? How should they be performed?” P. 49-77


MARCH 26: THE COMPARATIVE METHOD
Assignment: Identify a relevant universe of cases for your research design (2-3 pages) using Van Evera's criteria.

Goertz Chapters 6-8
Van Evera p.77-88

APRIL 2: THE COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL METHOD


APRIL 9: EXPERIMENTS AND FORMAL MODELS

Assignment Option I: Write a 2-3 page memo describing a lab, field, formal, or natural experiment that could be used to put some aspect of your theory or the mechanisms underlying it to an empirical test.

Assignment Option II: Write a 2-3 page memo describing a possible endogeneity problem in your project and how you intend to solve it or minimize the risk of biased inference.

Assignment Option III: If you believe that identification is not a problem for your project, write a 2-3 page memo explaining why endogeneity and sample selection are not issues.

Sprinz & Wolinsky Chapter 10; Chapters 11-14 (choose 1)

APRIL 16: INTERVIEWS, SURVEYS, ARCHIVAL RESEARCH, ETNOGRAPHIES

Interview and survey assignment due


Assignment: Details on a proposed experiment

APRIL 23: CONTENT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS


Assignment: Interview and survey assignment

APRIL 23: QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Grring Chapter 10
KKV, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 55-63, 91-95.
Sprinz & Wolinsky Chapter 6; Chapters 7-9 (choose 1)
Evan Lieberman. 2005. “Nested Analysis as a Mixed-

Assignment: Content and discourse analysis of a chosen set of texts.

MAY 5: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Students will be required to submit copies of a research design paper to all seminar participants one week in advance of presenting this design in the seminar. Each student will present their design in the seminar for a constructive critique of 15 minutes, with a short introduction from the student and/or advance reading questions suggesting issues or methodological dilemmas upon which participants should focus.