

Syllabus

POLS 2399 Research Methods

Course Description

This class examines the range of research methods and designs used in political science, based on applying the logic of social scientific inquiry. It reviews experimental research, comparative methods, case studies, interviewing, surveys, program evaluation, and other topics relevant to the discipline, as well as questions related to the practice of research ethics using examples of recent cutting-edge political science research. Course activities include intensive writing assignments by students. In addition to providing an opportunity to conduct social science research on personal and academic interests, this course also offers an introduction to analysis tools relevant to the workplace and productive uses of artificial intelligence. The skills learned in this class will not only help with conducting research and analysis in students' future work, but also enable them to critically evaluate political science literature.

This course is designed to be a risk friendly space. Mistakes, set backs, and iteration are all part of conducting research. I expect you to make progress throughout the course and to learn from your mistakes, and to support one another in learning from mistakes. I also expect you to clearly articulate the limitations of research in political science and the limitations of your own research. **I do not expect you to be perfect** on the first try; I expect you to make incremental progress and learn from each mistake.

Instructor Information

Sara Morrell, morrell.s@northeastern.edu

Required Course Hardware and Materials

- Reliable internet connection
- A computer device
 - For more information on borrowing hardware through Information Technology Services go to: <https://its.northeastern.edu/resources/hardware/>
 - For general information on technology resources or to request assistance go to: https://service.northeastern.edu/tech?id=tech_index_home
- All required readings and sample datasets will be available on Canvas or through the Northeastern Library. You should not need to pay for any tools or materials to complete the assignments in this course. If you encounter a paywall on any assigned material or if a free version of software is not available through Northeastern, please email me.
- The textbook for this course is Crano, W. D., Brewer, M. B., & Lac, A. (2024). *Principles and methods of social research, Fourth Edition*. Routledge.
<https://www.taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.neu.edu/reader/read-online/17f3753d-7737-4190-9f17-6f4d1b33aadf/book/pdf?context=ubx>. This textbook is available through the

library.

- Optional additional textbook Besen-Cassino, Y., & Cassino, D. (2023). Social research methods by example: applications in the modern world (Second edition.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003266327>. This textbook is available through the library.

Learning Goals

- Critically evaluate political science research
- Demonstrate an understanding of research methods used in the study of political science
- Assess the value and use of original and secondary sources of argumentation and evidence
- Apply and integrate personal and/or academic interests with study of political science
- Communicate effectively in written formats relevant to the field of political science
- Design an independent research project in the domain of government/governance and politics (broadly defined)

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify methods used in empirical political science research.
- Apply methods to political science research questions.
- Analyze data to measure concepts and draw inferences.
- Define causation and the multiple ways of reaching causal inferences.
- Communicate political science concepts and methods in writing.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

- Critical Reading Responses (28%): Critically evaluate recent political science research each week and apply relevant concepts to students' own independent research project and/or others' research. Post responses to open-ended critical evaluation questions on Canvas discussion board. Some weeks require peer responses. AI use is not allowed for these assignments as it can undercut learning. Use of AI to write your response may result in no credit on the assignment, as your response may be identical to someone else's who used the same AI model and this result is indistinguishable from plagiarism (addressed below). **The lowest grade will be dropped when calculating your average grade in this category.** Weekly readings, prompts, and rubrics are available on Canvas.
- Method Application (21%): Practice applying research methods to example datasets. In weeks 3, 4, and 5, the lectures will include a demonstration of how to apply the research method(s) we are learning about to an example dataset or text. Use of AI for the technical portions of these assignments (e.g. trouble shooting software downloads, finding buttons or functions) is encouraged but not required for these assignments. However, AI use is not allowed for completing the writing associated with these

assignments. **The lowest grade will be dropped when calculating your average grade in this category.** Detailed rubrics are available on Canvas.

- Independent Research Project (51%): Explore a research question of your choice, using a dataset and method of your choice. For the final paper and supplemental materials, the last two sections of this project, you can work in a group of up to three. All three individual methods and datasets from each group member's prior work must be integrated into a cohesive paper. All group members will receive the same grade for the final paper and supplemental materials. Please email me if you would like to work in a group and include all group members on the email. All portions of the research project except for the final paper and supplemental materials will be submitted on Canvas as discussion posts. If your research project is focused on a sensitive or potentially triggering topic, please email me and I will create a separate assignment submission so that other students are not upset by seeing potentially triggering materials. AI use is not allowed for completing the writing associated with these assignments. Detailed rubrics will be posted on Canvas.
 - Initial topics description (2.5%): Identify three potential topics for your research project based on your interests. Discuss how these topics relate to your personal experiences with government and/or politics, your broader academic interests, or your personal interests. You are encouraged, but not required, to continue work started in other courses.
 - Research question (5%): Develop one potential research question based on your topics that questions assumptions in the related literature. Provide a reference to one or more academic articles that contain the assumptions you are questioning.
 - Hypothesis (3.5%): Develop one hypothesis to explore in your research project. Your hypothesis should be clear and falsifiable (see textbook, p. 13 - 14). It should also be clearly related to your research question identified in the prior assignment, or the change in focus should be explained.
 - Dataset (5%):
 - Identify and provide a link to one publicly available dataset you will use to explore your hypothesis. You can choose to only explore a portion of a dataset as a "pilot study" if your selected dataset is particularly large.
 - Describe how this dataset is related to your hypothesis.
 - Describe how you identified this dataset and whether you used AI.
 - If AI was used, include the prompt, model, and date. Example AI prompt for finding datasets: "Please provide a list of publicly available datasets on the political uses of [your topic] appropriate for a social science research project." (Claude, Sonnet 4.6, June 3rd, 2026)

- If AI was not used, describe where you found the dataset (e.g. Pew Research Center, Analyze Boston, Harvard Dataverse)
 - Your dataset should not compromise privacy (e.g. collecting family members private social media posts without consent).
 - Method description, relevance, application, and results (10%):
 - Describe the method you are using
 - Restate your hypothesis and any changes to it from your original hypothesis
 - Describe why this method is appropriate for your hypothesis and dataset
 - Describe how you applied the method to your dataset (or a portion of it)
 - Describe AI use or non-use
 - If you used AI to help apply the method to your dataset, include the prompt, model, and date and why using AI was appropriate
 - If you did not use AI, briefly explain why using AI would be unhelpful, inappropriate, unethical, etc
 - Correctly interpret how the results relate to your hypothesis (e.g. do they support your hypothesis or not? Or are the results inconclusive?)
 - Remember that results that do not support your hypothesis are just as valuable as results that do support your hypothesis 😊
 - Limitations and Future Research (10%): Describe the limitations of your dataset and methods for the internal and external validity of your research. Describe how you would use one additional method with the same or a different hypothetical dataset (this does not have to be an existing dataset, it can be one you would like to create or access if you could) to address one limitation of your current method or dataset. Assume that you have sufficient time and funding (e.g. not infinite, but enough to travel to conduct interviews, or enough to offer a monetary incentive to participate in a survey).
 - Final paper (10%): Describe your topic, question, hypotheses, method, results, limitations, and future research. Individual word limit: 3,000 words. There is no required minimum word count. Can be done in a group of up to three. If you are working in a group, the final paper must cohesively integrate the datasets and methods used by all group members (this will be easier if you have similar topics). Group word limit: 5,000 words.
 - Supplemental materials (5%): Include clearly labeled and formatted datasets. If used, include other code or other analysis files as well.
- You can also earn up to 5.1% of extra credit for sharing your research outside of this class (or sharing cute pictures of pets, house plants, or local wildlife 😊). See below for details.

Re-grading Policy

To ensure all students receive timely feedback on assignments, assignments will not be re-graded, except in the case of a data entry error (e.g. entering 09 instead of 90).

Syllabus Changes

This syllabus is subject to change with notice, but additional assignments will not be added and deadlines will not be moved forward.

Community Standards

Be kind, thoughtful, helpful, and supportive toward one another in all of your interactions pertaining to this course. Any discussion board post that may be interpreted as discriminatory, unkind, or otherwise harmful will be removed and no credit will be given for that assignment. Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Inclusive Language

Although it can sometimes be tricky, I encourage you to do your best to be as inclusive as possible in your use of language. For pronouns, if you are writing about a specific, known person, always use that person's pronouns. If you don't know their pronouns, ask or use the neutral they. Avoid using he as a universal pronoun; likewise, avoid using binary alternatives such as he/she, he or she, or (s)he. If in doubt, use they as it includes all people and helps writers avoid making assumptions about gender. You can use they in the following way: "Their favorite color is blue," or "They have a degree in biology." If you do make a mistake when speaking or writing, no big deal! We all do. Hopefully we can learn and do better going forward.

Percentage Equivalents to Letter Grades in This Class

85-100 A

82-84 A-

80-81 B+

77-79 B

75-76 B-

73-74 C+
 71-72 C
 70 C-
 67-69 D+
 64-66 D
 60-63 D-
 0-59 F

Rubrics for specific assignments will be posted on Canvas.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will receive a deduction of one percentage point for each day after the deadline. Assignments turned in more than one week after the deadline will receive a 0, unless there is a significant reason for the delay (e.g. illness; distressing symptoms of menstruation; injury; unanticipated family obligations; food or housing insecurity; specific university-sponsored activities; religious holidays; military deployment; jury duty). **Please contact me as soon as you are aware of any issue that may impact your performance in this course so that we can work with the university to put the appropriate accommodations in place.**

Course Schedule

Week	Topics	Readings	Assignments Due (All times are in Eastern Daylight Time)
Week 1: June 29 - July 3	The logic of social scientific inquiry: Fundamental concepts AI literacy	Principles and methods: 1. Basic Concepts 2. Internal and External Validity 3. Measurement Reliability 4. Measurement Validity Amar, P., Badrinathan, S., Chauchard, S., & Sichart, F. (2026). Countering Misinformation Early: Evidence from a Classroom-Based Field Experiment in India. <i>American Political Science</i>	Due: Monday, July 6th, 11:59pm ☐ Initial topics description ☐ Critical Reading Response - Initial Post Due: Wednesday, 8th, 11:59pm ☐ Critical Reading Response - Follow-up

		<i>Review, 120(2), 725–745.</i> doi:10.1017/S0003055425101184	
Week 2: July 6 - 10	Research and data ethics ✨ ✨ Guest Lecture ✨ ✨	Principles and methods: 21. Social Responsibility and Ethics in Social Research Amar, et al. (2026) - Appendix F. Ethics Replication Data for: Countering Misinformation Early: Evidence from a Classroom-Based Field Experiment in India (https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/G2BK1G) Research Questions: A Core Ingredient in Developing Interesting Theories by Mats Alvesson & Jörgen Sandberg	Due: Sunday, July 12th, 11:59pm ☐ Research questions ☐ Critical Reading Response Due: Wednesday, July 15th, 11:59pm ☐ Critical Reading Response - Follow-up
Week 3: July 13 - 17	Interviewing ✨ ✨ Guest Lecture ✨ ✨	Principles and methods: 15. Interviewing D’Urso, A. S. (2026). What Happens When You Can’t Check the Box? Categorization Threat and Public Opinion among Middle Eastern and North African Americans. American Political Science	Due: Sunday, July 19th, 11:59pm ☐ Hypothesis ☐ Critical Reading Response ☐ Methods application Due: Wednesday, July 22nd, 11:59pm ☐ Critical Reading Response - Follow-up

		Review, 120(2), 599–623. doi:10.1017/S0003055425100919	
Week 4: July 20 - 24	Surveys	Principles and methods: 12. Survey Studies: Design and Sampling 16. Construction of Questionnaires and Rating Scales D’Urso, A. S. (2026). What Happens When You Can’t Check the Box? Categorization Threat and Public Opinion among Middle Eastern and North African Americans. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 120(2), 599–623. doi:10.1017/S0003055425100919	Due: Sunday, July 26th, 11:59pm ☐ Data sources ☐ Critical Reading Response ☐ Method Application Due: Wednesday, July 29th, 11:59pm ☐ Critical Reading Response - Follow-up
Week 5: July 27 - 31	Case studies and comparative methods ✨ Guest Lecture ✨	Powner, L. C. (2017). “Case Selection and Study Design for Qualitative Research” in <i>Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide</i>. Article Option 1: (content may be upsetting) Bates, G. (2025). Threats and Commitments: International Tribunals and Domestic Trials in Peace Negotiations. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 1–16. doi:10.1017/S0003055425101317	Due: Sunday, August 2nd, 11:59pm ☐ Method ☐ Critical Reading Response ☐ Method Application

		Article Option 2: Wratil, C., Wäckerle, J., & Proksch, S.-O. (2023). Government Rhetoric and the Representation of Public Opinion in International Negotiations. American Political Science Review, 117(3), 1105–1122. doi:10.1017/S0003055422001198	
Week 6: August 3 - 7	Experimental research	Principles and methods: 5. Designing Experiments: Variations on the Basics 9. Quasi- Experiments and Applied Research D’Urso, A. S. (2026). What Happens When You Can’t Check the Box? Categorization Threat and Public Opinion among Middle Eastern and North African Americans. American Political Science Review, 120(2), 599–623. doi:10.1017/S0003055425100919	Due: Sunday, August 9th, 11:59pm ☐ Research Project Limitations and Future Research ☐ Critical Reading Response
Week 7: August 10 - 14	Program evaluation	Fernandez, K., Gonzales, J. (2022). Politics in Program Evaluation. In: Farazmand, A. (eds) Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3_2517	Due: Sunday, August 16th, 11:59pm ☐ Final Paper ☐ Supplemental Materials ☐ Critical Reading Response

		Butz, A.M. and Gaynor, T.S. (2022), Intersectionality and Social Welfare: Avoidance and Unequal Treatment among Transgender Women of Color. Public Admin Rev, 82: 433-445. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13468	
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For detailed assignment guidelines and rubrics, please see Canvas.

AI Use

You are encouraged to creatively use AI to extend your capacity for research, not to replace your own thinking. AI use is encouraged for the method application assignments. It is also allowed for the dataset and the method portion of your research project. However, AI use is not allowed for completing the writing associated with these assignments. AI use is not allowed for your critical reading responses as it may deprive you of learning opportunities and impair your ability to critically judge research (and AI responses) for yourself, or for the writing associated with your research project. Use of AI to write text for your assignments may result in no credit on the assignment, as your response may be identical to someone else's if they used the same AI model and this result is indistinguishable from plagiarism (addressed below).

Extra Credit

Students can earn extra credit by sharing their research or pictures of pets:

- Applying for research funding from fellowships and scholarships through [Northeastern Undergraduate Research and Fellowships](#) (2.5% possible).
- Submitting abstracts or proposals to an academic or professional conference. The abstract or proposal needs to be appropriate for the conference (2.5% possible).
- Posting cute pictures of pets, local wildlife, or house plants to the Pets of POLS 2399 discussion board (0.1% possible)

If you are interested in pursuing either of these, or have another idea for sharing your research, please email me.

NU Academic Integrity Policy

Northeastern University is committed to the principles of intellectual honesty and integrity: the NU Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the website of the [Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution \(OSCCR\)](#). Plagiarism is a form of cheating that involves presenting the words or work of others as if it were one's own, and is a violation of the academic integrity policy. We

will work together in this class to make sure the boundaries of shared and independent work are clear for every assignment. Deliberate instances of plagiarism may result in a grade of F for the class and will be reported to OSCCR. Please always consult with me if you have any questions about how to include or reference materials from other sources in any assignment.

Title IX Protections and Resources

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects individuals from sex or gender-based discrimination, including discrimination based on gender-identity, in educational programs and activities that receive federal funding. Any NU community member who has experienced such discrimination, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, coercion, and/or sexual harassment, is encouraged to seek help. Confidential support and guidance can be found through [University Health and Counseling Services](#), the [Northeastern Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service](#), and the [Office of Prevention and Education at Northeastern \(OPEN\)](#). Note that faculty members are considered “responsible employees” at Northeastern University, meaning they are required to report all allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the [Title IX Coordinator](#). For additional information and assistance please see the [Belonging at Northeastern](#) webpage.

Discrimination

The Office for University Equity and Compliance is responsible for investigating complaints of discrimination. Any member of the Northeastern community who believes that they have been discriminated against is strongly encouraged to report the incident through the On-Line Discrimination Complaint Form (<https://www.northeastern.edu/ouec/reporting-options/discrimination/>) which exists to assist the complainant in formulating a concise statement of their allegations & is sent directly to the Office for University Equity & Compliance.

Disability Resource Center

The university’s [Disability Resource Center](#) works with students and faculty to provide students who qualify under the Americans With Disabilities Act with accommodations that allow them to participate fully in the activities at the university. Ordinarily, students receiving such accommodations will deliver teacher notification letters at the beginning of the semester. Students have the right to choose whether to disclose their specific disabilities to instructors but must provide a letter to receive accommodations.

WeCare

Your success in this class is important to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. If you or someone you know would like to discuss confidential information about health or mental health care, please contact Northeastern University Health and Counseling Services . Health and Counseling Services also provides 24/7 mental health support. If you need support and are not sure who to contact, We Care can connect you with the appropriate supports, services, and resources on campus. [WeCare](#) offers supports for students during times of difficulty or

challenge. You can find WeCare at 226 Curry Student center Monday - Friday from 8:30-5:00, call at 617-373-7591, or email wecare@northeastern.edu.

Mental Health Resources

In addition to mental health resources available through [Northeastern's University Health and Counseling Services](#) Northeastern has added [Find@Northeastern](#), which is a 24/7 mental health consulting line and can be reached at 1-877-223-9477.

The Writing Center

The [Northeastern University Writing Center](#) offers free and friendly tutoring for any level of writer, including help with conceptualizing writing projects, the writing process, and using sources effectively. The Writing Center has two on-ground locations: 412 Holmes Hall and 136 Snell Library as well as virtual appointment services. To make an appointment, or learn more about the Writing Center, visit <https://neu.mywconline.com/>, or email WritingCenter@northeastern.edu.

Peer Tutoring

The [Peer Tutoring Program](#) offers a wide range of tutoring services to meet the academic needs of undergraduate students. If you need academic assistance, contact the Peer Tutoring Program Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:30pm. Peer tutoring services are free and open to all NU undergraduate students. Peer tutoring begins the second week of classes and ends the last day of classes. The Peer Tutoring Program is located in 1 Meserve Hall. Call 617- 373-8931, email peertutoring@northeastern.edu, or visit the weblink above.

International Tutoring Center

The [International Tutoring Center \(ITC\)](#) provides current Northeastern University international students with free, comprehensive English language and academic support. The ITC includes English as a Second Language Tutoring (ESL), Language and Culture Workshops, and Reading Workshops. For more information on available workshops and tutoring opportunities please visit the ITC weblink above.

Snell Library

[Snell Library](#) offers a variety of resources for undergraduate research, including subject-specific [Research Guides](#), help with citation and bibliography, and 24/7 chat support.

FACT (Faculty Advisor Communication Tool)

I will be using this tool to alert advisors of any students who habitually fail to attend class, consistently do poorly on assignment, and/or do not attempt to participate in class. This is intended to help students who may benefit from additional support. If you think you might need extra help, please talk to me and/or your college advisor, and visit <https://cssh.northeastern.edu/resources/make-an-appointment-for-academic-advising/>.

Get Connected

- [Asian American Center](#)
- [Center for Intercultural Engagement](#)
- [Center for Spirituality, Dialogue & Service](#)
- [John D. O'Bryant African American Institute](#)
- [Latinx Student Cultural Center](#)
- [LGBTQA Center](#)
- [Northeastern Crossing](#)

Get Support - Academic

Northeastern sponsors and supports a variety of student success programs to help you connect with the community and achieve academic success. These programs include, among others, learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, career assistance, and campus life programming.

- [Writing Center](#)
- [Northeastern Library](#)
- [Undergrad Peer Tutoring Free and open to all](#)
- [Career Services](#)
- [Experiential Learning](#)
- [Northeastern Community Service](#)
- [Student Government Association \(SGA\)](#)
- [Disability Resource Center](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Program](#) (fee-based)
- [Diversity & Inclusion/Belonging](#)

Personal and Social

- [OPEN - Office of Prevention & Education](#) - topics of alcohol, substance abuse, drugs
- [OPEN SVRC Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)
- [OSCCR - Office of Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution](#)
- [WeCare](#) support system for students during times of difficulty or challenges
- [University Health & Counseling Services UHCS](#) (non-emergency med + mental health)
- Northeastern Office for University Equity and Compliance, Support Resources for Students, [Confidential Resources](#)
- [Lean on Me](#) is a peer-to-peer text hotline that allows for easy access to confidential non-crisis support.
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org. We can all help prevent suicide. The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7, free & confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources. You can also use this resource to find support for a friend or loved one (<https://988lifeline.org/help-someone-else/>).
- [Samaritans Crisis Hotline](#). Trained volunteers are available 24/7 for support & assistance.

Basic Needs Security

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe, stable place to live and believes this may affect performance class, is urged to contact your advisor for support. Please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. [Food Insecurity for Boston Students](#).

AI Use in Course Development

- Used Claude to evaluate the extent to which assignments could be completed by generative AI and to evaluate the utility of potential prompts.
- Used Gemini to provide feedback on some teaching materials, specifically slide content quality, and the clarity of some assignment instructions.
- Identified some data sources and articles from the Google Gemini AI search overview feature.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Rodine-Hardy and Dr. Brown, whose syllabi largely informed the development of this syllabus