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Thesis Research Design  
MIT  
Spring 2000  
Time: W, 3-5  
E51-061

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## Purpose

This seminar is for students who plan to write a senior thesis in Political Science, and is required of all MIT Political Science majors. Seminar participants will develop their research topics, review relevant research and scholarship, frame their research questions and arguments, choose an appropriate methodology for analysis, draft the introductory and methodology sections of their theses, and write a complete prospectus of the project.

## Subject organization

The seminar will meet weekly, although some sessions may be set aside for thesis project tasks. This will be an active, working seminar where each session will largely revolve around informal student discussions of material read in common and formal presentations of individual student projects.

***Most important notice about the subject:*** About half the weeks have a short written assignment associated with it. Those assignments are due **two days** before class begins, so that they can be distributed to other seminar participants. You must meet these deadlines. And, you must do the part of the assignment that requires you to read the written assignments and come to class prepared to work on them.

## Readings

The following text is assigned almost in its entirety, and is available for purchase at the Coop:

W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, 4th ed.

In addition, the following two books are used extensively in this class. They are available for purchase at the Coop, but you can also use the copies on reserve in Dewey:

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*.  
John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*

## Requirements and Grading

All assignments must be handed in on time. Grade penalties will be assessed unless I give you explicit permission for an extension.

**Class attendance is mandatory.** You must come to each and every class, or tell me beforehand you will be absent. You will be excused only if you or one of your family members dies, or if you are too sick to come to class. Under no circumstance will a conflict with another class be a satisfactory excuse for missing this class or being granted an extension.

I will assign your grade in this class after consulting with your thesis advisor. Therefore, it not only behooves you to take seriously the assignment in which you procure an advisor, it would also be a good idea if you actually got to know him or her and began seriously discussing what you will be doing for your thesis.

## Seminar Schedule

### February 2. Introductory meeting

**No special assignments for today**

This first session reviews the administrative details of the subject. Participants get a chance to introduce themselves. The seminar will move to an informal discussion of two questions:

- Can “political science” really be scientific, like physics or chemistry?”
- What is a thesis in political science?

**February 9. What's my topic?**

This session opens the door to individual research topics. What might be interesting and fun to investigate? How do scientific researchers decide what to research?

**Written assignment**

Select two different "topics" that you believe might be an interesting and rewarding subject for your thesis. Examples of topics include economic sanctions in U.S. foreign policy, the war on drugs, democracy at the community level, campaign finance, etc.

On a single sheet of paper do the following for each topic:

1. Describe the topic in a simple paragraph.
2. In a second simple paragraph, describe why this topic is worthy of study. What is the puzzle, issue, or reason that compels investigation? Why should anyone, besides you, be interested in this topic?
3. Write a draft thesis title
4. Be prepared to orally present this assignment in class.
5. Bring in a newspaper article that somehow is related to one of your two topics.

**Deadlines**

**February 7** Written assignment due

**February 9** Oral presentation

**Reading assignment:**

King, Keohane, and Verba, chap. 1

Creswell, chap. 1

### **February 16 The language of social science research**

Regardless of whether one is studying the quantum states of subatomic particles or the voting behavior of members of Congress, the precise statement of testable hypotheses, explicit specification of observable variables, informed application of controls, the delineation of measurement techniques, and the transparent explanation of the method of analysis and inference defines the project as “scientific.” In this session we examine the language and character of scientific inquiry in the context of social science research.

### **February 23 & March 1. Presentation of previous research** (No meeting on Feb. 23)

### **Reading assignment**

Shively, chaps. 2 & 3  
 King, Keohane, and Verba, chap. 2  
 Creswell, chaps. 2 & 6  
 Blalock and Blalock (1982), *Introduction to Social Research*, chaps. 1-2  
 Julian Simon (1969), *Basic Research Methods in Social Science*, chaps. 1-4

### **Written Assignment**

Find one example of research related to one of the topics you identified for the February 9th class. This can be either a book or an article. Write a two-page paper in which you discuss the research method and findings of the study. This paper should include the following:

1. Describe the research focus of the study, why it is significant, its general methods, and most important findings.
2. Identify the principal dependent and independent variables involved in the study and describe how they were measured.
3. Assess the findings. This involves answering two questions:
  - a. Did the study succeed, on its own terms?
  - b. What additional research does the study point towards?

### **Deadlines**

**February 23** Identify the study you will present; e-mail this to me

**February 28** Write a two-page summary, addressing the topics above

**March 1** Oral presentation in class

**March 8 & 15. Previous research: What did others have to say?** (No class meeting Mar. 8)

No research project takes place in a vacuum. All scientific research is grounded, somehow, in the work of others. This class focuses on the “literature” relevant to individual research projects. That is, we look at the *research context* of your proposed project.

- What is the intellectual history of your proposed topic?
- What have other scholars and researchers had to say about your proposed topic?
- What questions have they investigated?
- What have they found?

**March 22. Spring Break**  
(woo hoo!)

**Written assignment**

Conduct a *rapid* foray into the literature relevant to *each* of your two topics from the first assignment. Use one or more of the standard research indices. Try any index which follows books or articles in public affairs, the social sciences, law, or public policy. If necessary, ask the reference librarians at either Dewey or Hayden Libraries for help.

Find at least a dozen references—books, book chapters, and journal articles—on *each* of your two topics. Skim them quickly. That is, read the introduction and conclusion and browse the text in between. Then on a two sheets of paper *for each of your two topics*:

1. Provide the basic bibliographic information for each citation using the formats provided on the formatting handout.
2. For each citation provide a short paragraph on what research question investigated was and what was found.
3. Summarize the literature development in each of your topics, ending with an assessment of the major puzzles or questions that remain to be explored.

There are three deadlines associated with this assignment:

1. **March 8** Bibliography associated with each project (no descriptions necessary); e-mail this to me
2. **March 13** Paper assignments
3. **March 15** Oral presentation

**March 29 & April 5.****Developing an argument**

The time has come to move from a broad topic of interest to a specific argument for study. What theoretical or empirical argument do you want to investigate? Having familiarized yourself with a portion of the prior research of other investigators, you must now cull the unverified assumptions, seemingly weak arguments, empirical anomalies, logical puzzles, and questionable “conventional wisdoms” and select one to pursue.

**April 12 Data and methodological considerations (I)**

**April 19 & 26 Data and methodological considerations (II) (no meeting April 19)**

**Reading assignment**

Creswell, *Research design*, chapters 3–5

**Written assignment**

Pick a topic that will be your thesis topic. With that topic in mind:

1. Do the writing exercises in Creswell's, *Research Design*, p. 54
2. Do the appropriate writing exercise (1 or 2) on page 67 (I know, it's hokey, but it's a good exercise.)
3. Do the writing exercises on p. 78 (exercises 1 or 2 as appropriate, and exercise 3).

**Deadlines**

**April 3** Turn in written assignment

**April 5** Present and discuss your work in class. Following this discussion, you will be asked to choose a thesis advisor to work with you on your topic.

**Reading assignments**

King, Keohane, and Verba, chaps. 4–6

Shively, chaps. 6–9

**Writing assignment**

Write a three-page memo that discusses the methodological and data analysis issues associated with your project. Make sure you address these three topics:

1. Case selection. Which cases are you selecting, and why? (How does your case selection strategy undermine the validity of your study?
2. Measurement. What are your principal variables and how do you propose measuring them?
3. Data gathering. Where will you get your data? What credible evidence do you have that you could amass the data you need to do what you propose?

**Deadlines:**

**April 19** Turn in form to me verifying that you have acquired a thesis advisor

**April 24** Turn in written assignment

**April 26** Oral presentation

**May 3 & 10 Presentation of prospectus**

These classes will allow you to make a formal oral presentation of your thesis prospectus. Each student will have 15 minutes to explain the significance of the study, the methodology, and expected findings. Other faculty will attend the presentations to ask questions and evaluate the projects.

**Written assignment**

You will be randomly assigned either the 3rd or 10th to make your oral presentation. A *draft* prospectus is due two days before the oral presentation. A final draft will be due on the 10th. (For students who present on the 10th, I will extend a liberal extension policy, for those who ask ahead of time.)

Assemble your prospectus out of redrafted versions of previous assignments.

- I. Title
- II. Problem statement
- III. Literature analysis
- IV. Methodology and data discussion
- V. Expected findings and conclusions

## Citations

The *American Political Science Review* (APSR) is the official journal of the American Political Science Association, and therefore is the standard-setter for matters of scholarly style and practice. The following remarks have been adapted liberally (translation—lots of it has been taken verbatim) from the “Information and Instruction to Authors” that the APSR publishes. These instructions have been modified to make them appropriate for the papers written for this class and, more generally, for undergraduate theses.

### Notes

Citations are now properly included within the text of the manuscript, in most circumstances. If notes are necessary, you should use *footnotes*, not *endnotes*. Notes are used for two reasons: (1) to contain a lengthy list of citations that would detract from the flow of the text and (2) to make a parenthetical comment that clarifies what's in the text.

### References And Citations, General

Use embedded citations rather than notes for simple citations, including cases of "see," "see also," "compare," or comparable brief phrases. In an embedded list of several citations, arrange them in alphabetical rather than chronological order, e.g., Hare 1965, Singer 1963 rather than the reverse.

You must have a matching reference in the list of references for all citations in the paper, including those in notes to tables or figures.

Reference citation format includes month, season, or issue number (only one, in that order of preference) for journal articles. The issue identification (either month, season, or issue number) should be enclosed in parentheses and follow directly after volume number. If a journal uses months or seasons, please use that designation rather than issue numbers. If an issue number appears with no month or season, use the issue number. If both are given, use the month or season only.

Old form is:

Heimann, C. F. Larry. 1993. "Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems." *American Political Science Review* 87: 421–35.

New form is:

Heimann, C. F. Larry. 1993. "Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems." *American Political Science Review* 87 (June): 421–35.



### *Citing Older, "Classic," And Reprinted Works*

#### In-text Citations

For reprints or new editions of older works, both original and reprint or later edition dates should be given:

(Marx and Engels [1933] 1964, 25)

Classics may be cited in either of two ways. The first is to use the author–date system as given above, providing original date, date of publication of the particular edition being used, and page numbers. The second can be used when standard subdivisions of the work have been established and are used in the same way for all editions. This method commonly includes the author's name, title of the work, and a series of numbers representing decreasing subdivisions of the work:

(Thucydides, Peloponnesian War 2.40.2–3)

In this example above, the numbers refer to book, section, and sentence, but in other cases they may refer to volume, chapter, and paragraph. Citations to chapters and verses of the Bible or to numbers of The Federalist Papers would be of the same type. If the work exists in different translations, you should specify the particular edition being used and insert the year in brackets [ ] following the number series.

(Thucydides, Peloponnesian War 2.40.2–3 [1963])

There must be a reference for all cited works in the reference list at the end of the article.

#### References

For references either to older literature that is reprinted, or to new editions or translations of older (or "classic") works, include the original year of publication in brackets ([ ]) (unless unknown) along with the date of publication of the edition being used.

Burke, Edmund. [1790] 1987. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. John G. A. Pocock. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Madison, James, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. [1788] 1966. *The Federalist Papers*. Ed. Roy P. Fairfield. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. [1933] 1964. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

For reprint editions, both the original date (in brackets [ ]) and the reprint date should be given; then

publication information for the reprint should follow.

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. [1960] 1980. *The American Voter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint.

*Citation of Data Archived And Available at The Inter-university Consortium For Political And Social Research (ICPSR)*

Citations and references should be modeled on the official citation provided by the ICPSR, making the minimum of changes necessary to adapt them to APSR style. This will require that you (1) add the ICPSR study number to the full reference for the paper (omit leading zeros); (2) use the date of ICPSR distribution as the publication date; and (3) change the case of the study title.

For example, at the ICPSR web site the following information is given for a data set:

STUDYNO = 6805;

CITATION=Eldersveld, Samuel J., John E. Jackson, M. Kent Jennings, Kenneth Lieberthal, Melanie Manion, Michael Oksenberg, Zhefu Chen, Hefeng He, Mingming Shen, Qingkui Xie, Ming Yang, and Fengchun Yang.

FOUR-COUNTY STUDY OF CHINESE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL ECONOMY, 1990 [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan/Beijing, China: Beijing University [producers], 1994. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1996.;

For an in-text citation to this study, use (Eldersveld et al. 1996) or Eldersveld et al. (1996), depending on whether the author name is part of the sense of the sentence.

For the complete reference in the list of references at the end of a paper, use:

Eldersveld, Samuel J., John E. Jackson, M. Kent Jennings, Kenneth Lieberthal, Melanie Manion, Michael Oksenberg, Zhefu Chen, Hefeng He, Mingming Shen, Qingkui Xie, Ming Yang, and Fengchun Yang. 1996. Four-County Study of Chinese Local Government and Political Economy, 1990 [computer file] (Study #6805). ICPSR version. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan/Beijing, China: Beijing University [producers], 1994. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1996.

An example for data from the 1994 U.S. National Election Study, with the following ICPSR information:

STUDYNO = 06507;

CITATION=Rosenstone, Steven J., Donald R. Kinder, Warren E. Miller, and the National Election Studies. AMERICAN NATIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 1994: POST-ELECTION SURVEY [ENHANCED WITH 1992 AND 1993 DATA] [Computer file]. Conducted by University of Michigan, Center for Political

Studies. 2nd ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies/Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producers], 1995. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1995.;

For an in-text citation, use (Rosenstone et al. 1995) or Rosenstone et al. (1995).

For the end of article listing of references, use:

Rosenstone, Steven J., Donald R. Kinder, Warren E. Miller, and the National Election Studies. 1995. American National Election Study, 1994: Post-Election Survey [enhanced with 1992 and 1993 data] [computer file] (Study #6507). Conducted by University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies. 2nd ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies/Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producers], 1995. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1995.

#### *Citation of References From Internet Sites*

Citation of references from Internet sites are formatted to be as similar to normal article or book references as possible, with the addition of their Internet addresses and the date of your last access. The latter is used because these materials may not be permanently available. To avoid citation of materials that are no longer available in this form, or incorrect Internet addresses, please check, as late as possible in the production of your paper, that all Internet references can be found at the addresses given in your citations, and update the date of last access accordingly.

#### FTP (File Transfer Protocol) Sites

To cite text or data files available for downloading via ftp, give as much of the following information as is known: author's name, document date (year), full title of the work in quotation marks, any additional date information provided (month and day), address of the ftp site including full path needed to access the document, and the date of your last access.

Bruckman, Amy. 1994. "Approaches to Managing Deviant Behavior in Virtual Communities." April. <ftp://ftp.media.mit.edu/pub/asb/papers/deviance-chi94.txt> (December 4, 1994).

#### WWW (World Wide Web) Sites

To cite text or data files that may be viewed or downloaded via the World Wide Web, give as much of the following information as is known: author's name, document date (year), title of the work in quotation marks, the title of the complete work if applicable in italics (for example, a full book title if you are citing a chapter), any additional date information provided (month and day), URL (Uniform Resource Locator or address) including full path needed to access the document, and the date of your last access in

parentheses. URLs that are too long for one line should be continued on the next line without using a hyphen.

King, Gary, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg. 1998. "Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation." September 7. <http://gking.harvard.edu/preprints.shtml> (October 22, 1998).