PS 732: Making Your Project Better
Gross 111
Wednesdays, 7:30-10:00

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By appointment        2-4, Wednesdays

Course Description:
This class has two goals: First and most importantly, to take your nascent project/qualifying paper/dissertation proposal and turn it into a very clear project; second, to use some readings and discussion on key topics in research design to service the development of your project. To those ends, the class will be highly participatory and rely on many presentations by you. Each student will present three papers of increasing length to the class on their research topic. These presentations will start early in the semester, so you need to enter the class with at least a moderately clear research question in your head. This is not a class for students in search of an idea and who want to investigate a broad array of potential methodologies to inform their future research.

Course Assignments:
1) Readings and Discussion (30%): The reading load is light, but the readings are important. If you don't do the readings and participate, you don't earn the right for the rest of class to help you with your project. There are three key modes of participation:
   a) In-class discussion of the readings. To facilitate discussion, please post a half page or so of discussion points/questions bearing on the week's reading to the shared Dropbox folder by 24 hours before class. In some weeks we will provide you with an assignment; in others not. You can raise questions about theory, method, point out conflicts between readings, develop links with previous weeks' readings, whatever. These needn't be long and detailed, but they should be thoughtful.
   b) In-class discussion of your fellow students’ papers. To that end, all paper assignments (2-4, below) are due 24 hours before the start of the seminar (i.e., papers should be posted on Dropbox by 8:00 PM Tue. night). It is expected that everyone will read each paper and come to seminar with questions / comments. Shirking will be called out!
   c) As a formal discussant of a fellow student’s work. We will assign you to discuss a colleague’s work at each of the three key steps below. You will have 5 concise minutes to raise crucial questions about provide recommendations (no summarizing!); that might seem very short, but when you serve as a discussant on a conference panel, that’s about what you will have.

2) Presentation of Proposal 1 (20%): Presentation of a short, pithy, effective three-page document that answers: What is your research question? Why should the world care? How does it fit into some relevant literature? And what are your initial ideas bearing on theory and testing? Students will make a 5-7 minute presentation (with 10 minutes for Q&A). Note: We want students to experiment with ideas. If you would rather present two ideas, you can do so in 5 pages and a slightly longer presentation.

3) Presentation of Proposal 2 (20%): Presentation of a different short, pithy, effective three-page document that answers: What is your research question? Why should the world care? How does it fit into some relevant literature? And what are your initial ideas bearing on theory and testing? Note 1: We want you to experiment with different ideas, but conditional on a particularly compelling initial idea, the instructors can approve scaling the earlier idea and presenting that for this proposal.
4) Presentation of 10-page Project or Complete Paper (30%): Building on the progress above, this should include a very clear design and some preliminary results, if appropriate. It's gotta be good. Students will make a 10-minute presentation (with 10 minutes for Q&A). **Note:** Some of you will enter the class farther along with your ideas. If so, you should aim for a complete paper rather than a proposal. Talk with us early in the semester to clarify expectations for your specific project. If students have a complete draft of a paper, that (of course) could be presented instead.

**TOPICS:**
Jan. 16: INTRO & WHAT ARE PUZZLES? Induction, deduction, and short intro to epistemology
- Przeworski and Salomon. 1995. “On the Art of Writing Proposals”
- Krugman. “How I Work”
- Varian, “How to Build an Economic Model in Your Spare Time.”
- Chapters 3 and 4 in Jack Oliver, The Incomplete Guide to the Art of Discovery.

**Assignment 1:** Go to the Annual Review of Political Science (or something similar like Handbook of Political Economy, Oxford, etc.) and review materials that bear on your big interest/s. Identify three specific hooks/questions/puzzles in your specific field of study and write them up in a paragraph+ each.

Jan. 23: THEORY, EITM AND THE ROLE OF THEORY IN EMPIRICAL TESTS
- Przeworski, Adam. 2006. ‘Is the Science of Comparative Politics Possible?’

**Assignment 2:** What is the core, foundational model/s in your specific area of study (i.e. the hook/question/puzzle you developed last week)? Why? Strengths/weaknesses?

Jan 30: Presentations R#1
Feb 6: Presentations R#1, continued
Feb 13: Presentations R#1, continued
Feb 20: Presentations R#2, continued
Feb 27: Presentations R#2, continued
Mar 6: Presentations R#2, continued
Mar 13: No class, spring break.
Mar 20: RESEARCH DESIGN: CAUSAL INFERENCE, OBSERVATIONAL DATA, AND EXPERIMENTS
- Chapters 1 and 2 in Morgan and Winship. 2014. Counterfactuals and Causal Inference: Methods and Principles for Social Research. CUP.
  - **Something on the limitations of experiments. TBD.**

**Assignment 3:** Write 3 different 1-page research designs for your favorite proposal.
Mar 27: COLLECTING & INTERPRETING DATA: OBSERVATIONAL/EXTANT, FIELD, AND BIG

- READING ON DATA: TBD

**Assignment 4**: Write 3 different 1-page documents outlining sources of data for your favorite proposal—one each on observational data, field (i.e. originally collected) data, and big data (be imaginative). In each case, be clear about concept validity and measurement.

Apr 3: FINAL PRESENTATIONS of 12-page proposals (1\textsuperscript{st} 1/3).

Apr 10: FINAL PRESENTATIONS of 12-page proposals (2\textsuperscript{nd} 1/3).

Apr 17: FINAL PRESENTATIONS of 12-page proposals (3\textsuperscript{rd} 1/3).