



POLI 4110 Research Methodology
Political Science Department
Fall 2026
Thursdays 2:30-5:30 pm via Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Mathie

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Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom.

Course Description

This seminar in political science research methods is designed to help you recognize the decisions, logic and steps required for good political research in order to aid you both in understanding and judging scholarly work and in crafting your own research. In this course, you will be introduced to a range of methodological approaches that are commonly employed today in political science research. You will read about and discuss the objectives, assumptions, strengths and limitations of these different approaches. You will also develop and practice important research skills (through course assignments and in-class activities) and attain a basic working knowledge of key quantitative methods that will help you to make sense of the use of numbers and models common in modern political science research.

Within the discipline of political science, there are major debates about method rooted in fundamentally different understandings of what we can know about politics and how we know it, and this course is structured to gradually introduce you to these methodological debates: after a broad introduction to political research, we will first focus on the behavioural and quantitative approach before studying qualitative critiques of this approach and qualitative and interpretive methods. Familiarity with the methodological tensions and tradeoffs that shape the field of political science research will place you in a better position to evaluate the claims and evidence that different political scientists present.

Your participation in class discussions and activities in this seminar is essential as we reflect on and apply the theories and methods we are studying together. For this reason, you are expected to have a working webcam throughout the course. Of course, since the class is being offered over Zoom, some necessary adjustments may be made as we go along to the format of seminar sessions in order to make it possible for everyone to get the most out of it; I appreciate your flexibility.

Course Requirements

Required Texts:

For this course, we will not be using a textbook. All of the required readings are listed in the Course outline and will be found in reading packages or links provided on the course website in the Content section. All students are expected to either print out these readings or download them to a second electronic device such that they can be read carefully prior to our seminars and consulted during our class discussions without disrupting your access to our zoom seminar. **(Cost for texts = free)**

Note: Please ensure that you take adequate time throughout each week to carefully read, work through and take notes on each of the required readings before we meet on Thursdays to discuss them together. Since we only meet for a single seminar each week, you will be assigned substantial reading material for each session, and you should be prepared each Thursday to ask and answer questions about the readings and to take part together with your classmates in a fruitful in-depth discussion of the assigned material in our Zoom meetings.

Grading:

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Assignment 1: 10%

Assignment 2: 10%

Assignment 3: 10%

Paper: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

Course Delivery: This course is a seminar rather than a lecture-based course. As it is a discussion-based class being offered over Zoom, in order to take part as expected in the sessions, you will have to have regular computer (with web cam) access and a stable internet connection. Although occasional technical difficulties may arise beyond your control, you are expected to have your web cam on and in working order because student engagement and interaction are crucial to learning in this format.

Please start class with your camera on and your microphone muted. When you have a question or comment to share with the class, please use the "raise hand" feature to get my attention (unless there is already a pause); once called upon, you should unmute your mic and join the discussion. (Contributions through the written chat function tend to undermine the possibility of a single conversation in which we are all taking part and learning from one another; I would prefer that you avoid using this function, and I may disable it.)

Unless you have an accommodation and prior permission through Student Accessibility Services to record lectures, **you are absolutely prohibited from making any type of recording of our lectures/discussions.**

Attendance and Participation: All students are expected to:

- 1) Read assigned material carefully.
- 2) Have working web cameras and turn them on throughout the entirety of our class sessions.**
- 3) Be prepared to raise and to discuss questions about the readings over Zoom.
- 4) Have printed or digital copies (on an alternate device) of the readings with them during the Zoom seminar.
- 5) Avoid: (a) excessive absences from or lateness to our seminars; (b) being or appearing inattentive to seminars; (c) engaging in conversations with others outside of the Zoom seminar during class time.

Participation marks are not free:

- Consistently meeting these expectations will earn a mark in the B range (70-79%).
- Consistently meeting these expectations AND regularly participating thoughtfully in our discussions will be required for a mark in the A range (80-100%).
- Failure to follow even one of the expectations may result in an extremely low grade.

For each of the three smaller assignments as well as the term paper, I will accept late assignments after the due date, but late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day late. I may approve an extension for an assignment if you request it for a serious reason **well in advance of the due date, but not after the assignment is already due.**

Assignment 1: In this written assignment, you will apply concepts studied in our September 17th class session. The assignment will be due September 27th at 11:59 pm. Instructions will be provided on d2l on September 17th.

Assignment 2: In this written assignment, you will apply concepts studied in our October 1st class session. The assignment will be due October 11th at 11:59 pm. Instructions will be provided on d2l on October 1st.

Assignment 3: In this written assignment/problem set, you will apply statistical and quantitative concepts studied in our classes of October 8th and October 22nd. The assignment will be due November 8th at 11:59 pm. Instructions will be provided on d2l on October 22nd.

Paper: In this 7-9 page paper, you will analyze and discuss a scholarly research article (chosen from a list of works to be provided to students in mid-October), explaining and evaluating the research method used by its author(s), and situating the approach within the methodological debates we have studied in this class. Detailed instructions for the essay will be provided on d2l along with the list of works to choose from. Papers will be due December 6th at 11:59 pm.

Final Exam: The final exam will be administered online. More information (including a review guide) will be provided about the format and content in the lead-up to the exam.

Other Important Policies

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. It should go without saying that cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. You should familiarize yourself with the Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity – and, in particular, sections 26 and 83 through 85. All of these policies will be enforced in full in this course, and the Code will be adhered to in terms of disciplinary action. It is worth emphasizing the following:

PLAGIARISM INVOLVES PRESENTING ANOTHER'S WORK, IDEAS, THEORIES, OR INTERPRETATION AS ONE'S OWN.

To avoid plagiarism, always:

- 1) Put quotation marks around any words taken from sources.
- 2) Paraphrase material completely; do not simply rearrange words from a source or change them using a thesaurus, etc.
- 3) Whether it is being quoted or paraphrased in your work, always give accurate and complete citations for all material that comes from another source.
- 4) Avoid borrowing entire arguments or ideas from another writer. Your arguments should be original to you.

GenAI Use Prohibited:

Generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI or GenAI) is a category of AI systems capable of generating text, images, or other media in response to prompts. These systems include ChatGPT and its variants Bing (built by OpenAI) and Bard (built by Google) among several others. Other Generative AI models include artificial intelligence art systems such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E.

Any use of GenAI systems to produce assignments for this course is not permitted. All work submitted for evaluation in this course must be the student's original work. The submission of any work containing AI generated content will be considered a violation of academic integrity ("Use of Unauthorized Materials").

Academic Accommodations: Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities/medical conditions. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities/medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability/medical condition and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please email sas@lakeheadu.ca or visit <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas>.

Course Outline

NOTE: Readings and schedule may be adjusted as necessary at my discretion.

Sept 10 Course syllabus and introduction:

- Aristotle on methods in political science
- Robert Keohane, "Political Science as a Vocation." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2009.

Sept 17 Crafting Research

- Jonathan Kirshner, "Alfred Hitchcock and the Art of Research." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, September 1996.
- Michael Nelson, "The Research Question." Political Science Guide.com, 2024.
<https://politicalscienceguide.com/what-is-research/the-research-question-2/>
- Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, et al. Selections from *The Craft of Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers*, 2008.

Sept 24 Approaching Political Questions Scientifically

- Karl Popper, Selections from "Science: Conjectures and Refutations." In *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 1962.

- Robert Dahl, "The Behavioural Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest," *The American Political Science Review*, 1961.
- Robert Keohane, Gary King, and Sidney Verba, "1.1.2 Defining Scientific Research in the Social Sciences." In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, 1994.

Oct 1 Conceptualizing, Describing and Making Inferences in Political Science

- John Gerring, Selections from "What Makes a Concept Good." *Polity*, 1999.
- John Gerring, Selection from "What is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review*, 2004.
- Robert Keohane, Gary King, and Sidney Verba, Selections from "Chapter 2: Descriptive Inference." In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, 1994.

Oct 8 Causal Inferences and the Role of Statistics in Political Science

- Hank Jenkins-Smith, Joseph Ripberger, et al. Selections from "Chapter 1. Theories and Social Science." In *Quantitative Research Methods for Political Science, Public Policy and Public Administration*, 2017.
- Harrison and Startin, "Chapter 2: Introducing Quantitative Analysis." In *Political Research: An Introduction*, 2001.
- Butt, Widdop and Winstone, "The Role of High-Quality Surveys in Political Science Research." In *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Political Science*, 2019.
- Squire, "Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1988.

Oct 12-16 FALL STUDY WEEK: No Classes

Oct 22 Introduction to Regression Analysis in Quantitative Political Science

- Introductory video on Correlation and Regression Analysis
- Mark Zachary Taylor, "Regression Analysis." In *21st Century Political Science: A Reference Handbook*, 2010.

Oct 29 Game Theory in Political Science

- Introductory video on the Prisoner's Dilemma
- Gates & Humes, "Chapter 1: Modeling with Games." In *Games, Information, and Politics*, 2017.
- Alan Taylor and Allison Pacelli, "Chapter 4: Conflict." In *Mathematics and Politics*, 2008.

Nov 5 Limits to the Quantitative Perspective

- Joel Best, "Lies, Calculations and Constructions: Beyond *How to Lie with Statistics*." *Statistical Science*, 2005.
- Gabriel Almond & Stephen Genco, "Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics," *World Politics*, 1977.

Nov 12 Debates over Case Studies and Comparative Research

- Seha & Muller-Rommel, "Case Study Analysis." In *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Political Science*, 2019.
- Lijphart, Selection from "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review*, 1971.
- Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1980.

Nov 19 Introduction to Interpretive Political Science

- Dvora Yanow, "Interpretive Political Science: What Makes This Not a Subfield of Qualitative Methods." *Qualitative Methods*, 2003.
- Ercan & Marsh, "Qualitative Methods in Political Science," from *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Political Science*, 2019.
- Bayard de Volo and Schatz, "From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2004.

Nov 26 Key Qualitative Methods and Their Challenges

- Joe Soss, "Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice-Centered Approach to In-Depth Interviews for Interpretive Research," from *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, 2014.
- Elizabeth Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones." *Qualitative Sociology*, 2006.
- Malejacq & Mukhopadhyay, "The 'Tribal Politics' of Field Research: A Reflection on Power and Partiality in 21st-Century Warzones," *Perspectives on Politics*, 2016.

Dec 3 Indigenous Methods and Critiques of Social Science

- Linda Tuhiwai, "Introduction." In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2012.
- Margaret Kovach, Chapter 1 of *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, 2021.

TBD FINAL EXAM