



POLI 4110 Research Methodology

Political Science Department

Winter 2026

Mondays 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 can 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 finally considering the interpretive approach. 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 are devoting adequate time throughout each week to carefully read, work through and take notes on each of the required readings before we meet on Mondays to discuss them together. Since we only meet once a week, you should expect to be preparing substantial reading material for each class session, and

you should come to each session ready to take part in significant work together with the rest of the class within our Zoom meeting.

Grading:

Assignment 1: 10%

Assignment 2: 10%

Assignment 3: 10%

Paper: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

Participation: 15%

For each of the following assignments you are required to submit for this course, late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. I may approve extensions for reasonable grounds well in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Assignment 1: Assignment 1 is a written assignment in which you will apply concepts discussed in our January 12th class session. The assignment will be due on January 25th at 11:59 pm. Instructions will be provided on d2l on January 12th.

Assignment 2: Assignment 2 is a written assignment in which you will apply concepts discussed in our January 26th class session. The assignment will be due on February 8th at 11:59 pm. Instructions will be provided on d2l on January 26th.

Assignment 3: Assignment 3 is a written assignment/problem set in which you will apply quantitative and statistical concepts discussed in our classes on February 2nd and 9th. The assignment will be due on March 1st at 11:59 pm. Instructions will be provided on d2l on February 9th.

Papers: For your 7-9 page term paper in this course, you will select and write about an example of scholarly research (chosen from a list of works to be provided to students in

mid-February), analyzing and evaluating the research presented in this work and the method used by the author(s) to perform this research, and situating the approach of the author(s) within the major methodological debates we are studying in the class.

Detailed instructions for the essay will be provided on d2l along with the list of works to choose from. Your papers will be due on April 7th at 11:59 pm.

Class Participation: All students are expected to:

1. Read assigned material carefully.
2. **Have working Zoom cameras and turn them on throughout the entirety of our class sessions.**
3. Be prepared to discuss and answer 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.

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. In particular, you should familiarize yourself with the Student Code of Conduct - Academic Integrity (especially 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.

Generative AI 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.

Jan 5 Introduction to Course Syllabus and to Political Science Methods

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

Jan 12 Beginning to Craft Research: Questions and Problems

- 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.

Jan 19 Being "Scientific" about Political Questions

- 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.

Jan 26 Political Concepts, Description and Inference

- 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.

Feb 2 Causal Theories and Statistics in Quantitative 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.
- Robert Keohane, Gary King, and Sidney Verba, Selections from “Chapter 3: Causality and Causal Inference.” In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, 1994.
- 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.

Feb 9 Introduction to Regression Analysis within Quantitative Political Science

- Introductory video on Correlation and Regression Analysis
- Mark Zachary Taylor, “Regression Analysis.” In *21st Century Political Science: A Reference Handbook*, 2010.
- Alan O. Sykes, “An Introduction to Regression Analysis” (Coase-Sandor Institute for Law & Economics Working paper No. 20, 1993).

Feb 16 Family Day (& start of Winter Study Week) - NO CLASS

Feb 23 Introduction to Game Theory within 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.

March 2 Limits and Criticism of Quantitative Political Science

- 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.

March 9 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.

March 16 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.

March 23 Key Qualitative Methodologies and 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.

March 30 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.

Exam TBD