

# Introduction to Research Design & Methods

Course no. 4460  
Winter 2012

Jonathan Renshon  
jrenshon@gmail.com  
R223

Monday/Wednesday  
0800-0950 or 1300-1450  
ING-323 or ING-263

---

## 1 Goals

The goal of this course is to aid you in designing your thesis project. You will come out of this class with a finished and approved proposal for your thesis. The readings and assignments for this class are all geared towards that one goal. The readings will help give you a solid grounding in some basic principles of social science methodology, and provide you as well with some examples of applied research methods. The written assignments are designed as ‘building blocks’ for your thesis proposal. Doing the readings, participating in discussions and working hard on the written assignments will all help a great deal as you start your thesis research. At the end of the course, you will all present your research proposals to the rest of the class.

## 2 Grading

This course is graded Pass/Fail. Whether you pass depends on the following:

1. Doing the reading and participating in discussion
2. Written Assignments
3. Presentation of Thesis Proposal

In the end, how much effort you devote to this course will have a much bigger impact than the grade alone, since putting in work now will make the thesis process much, much easier.

## 3 Assignments

All readings are available by clicking on the links in this syllabus. Updates to the syllabus and other relevant announcements will be posted at <http://jonathanrenshon.com/Site/Teaching>

All written assignments should be turned in *in hard copy* in my mailbox by 3pm the day that they are due. Obviously, there will be a wide range of theses, on different topics, for different audiences, etc. Your goal should be to write in the style and format that is appropriate (this is something you should be discussing with your advisors) for your audience, but will stand up to scrutiny from academics (i.e., other professors).

### 1. Thesis Proposal (beta version)

- Due: **28 January**
- Length: 1-2 pages
- Description: This is due quite early in the quarter, so the goal is simple: write a short paper describing your proposed thesis topic (or your best idea, if you haven't yet decided on a topic). Every paper should include a discussion of:
  - (a) Question- what question are you attempting to answer?
  - (b) Significance- why should readers care about this question or topic?

Note that you do *not* need to know the 'answer' yet, so please do not focus on what the thesis will conclude. This is a preliminary record of your thoughts, in organized form. There will be plenty of time to revise and improve your proposal over the course of the quarter.

### 2. Literature Review + Research Design

- Due: **20 February**
- Length: 2-4 pages
- Description: This paper should have three sections:
  - (a) Overview: A few sentences giving the reader an overview of your project. What are you going to be writing about?
  - (b) Literature Review: Identify and discuss the key bodies of knowledge and scholarship relevant to your research topic. We will talk in class about resources that might be useful, but I would also suggest getting an early start in meeting with your advisors and other faculty members who may be able to point you in the right directions.
  - (c) Research Design: This section should propose a 'plan of attack' for the methodology you plan to use in your thesis. Which method will you use? What about that method is well-suited towards your research goals and questions? Are there alternative methods that might be useful? Discuss the strengths *and* weaknesses of that methodology as it relates to your research.

### 3. Completed Thesis Proposal (signed and approved by your two advisors)

- Due: **13 March**
- Description: You will be working closely with your advisors by this point, who will tell you the format they prefer for thesis proposals. However, samples of some previous proposals can be seen [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) & [here](#).

## 4 Background Readings

### Writing

- The Dissertation Proposal (1997), Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, pp. 115-116

- Helpful Hints on Writing a Political Science Dissertation (1997), Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, pp. 97-113
- How to Write a Paper (1997), Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, pp. 123-128
- Doing a Literature Review (2006), Jeffrey Knopf, *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39/1:127-132
- Writing it Up (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 183-197

## Visualizing and Presenting Data

- Using Graphs Instead of Tables in Political Science (2007), Jonathan Kastellec and Eduardo Leoni, *Perspectives on Politics* 5/4: 755-771
- How to Display Data Badly (1984), Howard Wainer, *The American Statistician* 38/2: 137-147
- Let's Practice What We Preach: Turning Tables into Graphs (2002), Andrew Gelman, Cristian Pasarica & Rahul Dodhia, *The American Statistician* 56/2: 121-130
- Making the Most of Statistical Analysis: Improving Interpretation and Presentation (2000), Gary King, Michael Tomz & Jason Wittenberg, *The American Journal of Political Science* 44/2: 341-355

## 5 Schedule

### 7 January

Intro class (no readings)

### 9 January

#### Research Design I

- Introduction & Causal Analysis (1992), Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*, pp. 1-38

### 14 January

#### Research Design II

- Hypotheses, Laws and Theories: A User's Guide (1997), Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, pp. 7-48
- The Levels of Analysis Problem in International Relations (1961), J. David Singer, *World Politics* 14/1: 77-92

### 16 January

#### Research Design III

- Symposium on *Designing Social Inquiry*
  - Disciplining Political Science (1995), David Laitin, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 454-456

- Research Design, Falsification, and the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide (1995), James Caporaso, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 457-460
- The Role of Theory and Anomaly in Social-Scientific Progress (1995), Ronald Rogowski, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 467-470
- Translating Quantitative Methods for Qualitative Researchers: The Case of Selection Bias (1995), David Collier, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 471-474
- Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide in Political Science (1995), Sidney Tarrow, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 457-460
- The Importance of Research Design in Political Science (1995), Gary King, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 475-481

**21 January**  
**NO CLASS**

**22 January (Shift Day Schedule. Note that this class takes place on a Tuesday)**  
**Case Studies I**

- Increasing the Number of Observations (1994), Gary King, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, pp. 208-230
- Determining What to Observe (1994), Gary King, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, pp. 115-149
- How Not to Lie Without Statistics (2008), Gary King and Eleanor Powell

**23 January**  
**Case Studies II**

- What Are Case Studies? How Should They Be Performed? (1997), Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, pp. 49-88
- Process Tracing and Causal Inference (2010), Andrew Bennett, in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, pp. 207-219

**28 January**  
**Case Studies III**

- Developing an Interpretation Through Textual Analysis: The 1941 Case (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 79-139
- Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis (2012), Marc Trachtenberg, *Security Studies* 21/1: 3-42

**30 January**  
**Counterfactuals**

- Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science (1991), James Fearon, *World Politics* 43/2: 169-195
- What's So Different about a Counterfactual? (2000), Richard Ned Lebow, *World Politics* 52/4: 550-585

- Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics (1996), Philip Tetlock & Aaron Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological and Psychological Perspectives*, pp. 3-38

#### **4 February**

##### **Formal Theory I**

- Rigor or Rigor Mortis?: Rational Choice and Security Studies (1999), Stephen Walt, *International Security* 23/4: 5-48  
+ responses:
  - The Modeling Enterprise and Security Studies (1999), Robert Powell, *International Security* 24/2: 97-106
  - The Contributions of Rational Choice: A Defense of Pluralism (1999), Lisa Martin, *International Security* 24/2: 74-83
  - Return of the Luddites (1999), Emerson Niou and Peter Ordeshook, *International Security* 24/2: 84-96
  - All Mortis, No Rigor (1999), Frank C. Zagare, *International Security* 24/2: 107-114

#### **6 February**

##### **Formal Theory II**

- Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes (1994), James Fearon, *American Political Science Review* 88/3: 577-592
- Formal Models of International Politics (2004), Duncan Snidal, in *Models, Numbers and Cases*, pp. 227-264
- The Art of Shaker Modeling: Game Theory and Security Studies (2004), Andrew Kydd, in *Models, Numbers and Cases*, pp. 344-366

#### **11 February**

##### **Quantitative Methods I**

- Regression-Based Inference: A Case Study in Failed Causal Assessment (2010), Jason Seawright, in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, pp. 247-271
- The Promise and Peril of Statistics in International Relations (2004), Bear Braumoeller and Anne Sartori, in *Models, Numbers and Cases*, pp. 129-151
- The Difference Between “Significant” and “Not Significant” is Not Itself Statistically Significant (2006), Andrew Gelman and Hal Stern, *The American Statistician* 60/4: 328-331

#### **13 February**

##### **Quantitative Methods II**

- Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve (2008), Jessica Weeks, *International Organization* 62/1: 35-64

**18 February**

**NO CLASS (President's Day  
Starting a Project**

- Starting a Project (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 169-182
- Identifying the Scholarly Literature (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 199-216
- What is a Political Science Dissertation? (1997), Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, pp. 89-95

Optional:

- Working with Documents (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 140-168
- Working with Primary Sources (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 217-255

**20 February**

**Experiments**

- Lab Experiments are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences (2009), Armin Falk and James Heckman, *Science* 326: 535-538
- Experimental Methods in Political Science (2002), Rose McDermott, *Annual Review of Political Science* 5:31-61
- Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach (2007), Michael Tomz, *International Organization* 61/4 : 821-840

**25 February**

**Natural Experiments**

- Using Comparative Methods in Studies of Human History (2011), Jared Diamond & James Robinson, in *Natural Experiments of History*, pp. 257-275
- From Ancien Régime to Capitalism: The Spread of the French Revolution as a Natural Experiment (2011), Daron Acemoglu, Davide Cantoni, Simon Johnson & James Robinson, in *Natural Experiments of History*, pp. 221-256
- Observing the Counterfactual? The Search for Political Experiments in Nature (2009), Gregory Robinson, John McNulty & Jonathan Krasno, *Political Analysis* 17: 341-357

**27 February**

**Threats to Inference I**

- Seeing What We Expect to See: The Biased Evaluation of Ambiguous and Inconsistent Data (1993), Thomas Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn't So: The Fallibility of Human Reasoning in Everyday Life*, pp. 49-72

- Seeing What We Want to See: Motivational Determinants of Belief (1993), Thomas Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn't So*, pp. 75-87
- Understanding What to Avoid (1994), Gary King, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, pp. 150-207

#### **4 March**

##### **Threats to Inference II**

- Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life (1997), Robert Jervis, *Political Science Quarterly* 112/4: 569-593
- How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics (1990), Barbara Geddes, *Political Analysis* 2/1: 131-150

#### **6 March**

##### **Threats to Inference III**

- Selection Bias in Qualitative Research (1996), David Collier and James Mahoney, *World Politics* 49/1: 56-91
- A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations (2002), Cameron Thies, *International Studies Perspectives* 3: 351-372

#### **11 March**

##### **Presentations I**

#### **13 March**

##### **Presentations II**

#### **18 March**

##### **Presentations III**