Overview

This seminar introduces PhD students to the study of politics through the procedures of science. It will familiarize students with methodological challenges encountered in research, such as concept formation, theory development and testing, case selection, variable operationalization and measurement, and descriptive and causal inference. Students will learn to assess research designs and causal claims as both consumers and producers of research. We will not learn how to carry out particular research methodologies (how to go to the field, how to read history, how to estimate an IV regression), but rather how to craft research that makes the best use of these methodologies.

The seminar focuses on contemporary debates in political methodology and their implications for research on comparative and international politics. The list of topics should not be considered exhaustive. In our discussions, we will consider what a comparative methods syllabus from twenty years ago would have looked like, and ask what a comparative methods syllabus twenty years in the future might look like.

Course Goals

The course has two primary goals. First, the material covered in this course, along with material from Government 6353, prepares PhD students to take the comparative politics A exam. Second, the course will prepare students to conduct original research for their A paper and dissertation. Students, therefore, will apply concepts and techniques to their own research questions as the semester progresses.

Requirements

Prerequisites: There are no formal prerequisites, but enrollment is at the instructor’s discretion, and priority will be given to PhD students in the Government department. The maximum enrollment will be 15.
Assignments and Grading: You are required to attend all class meetings, to come to seminar having read and thought about the assigned material for the week, and to participate actively in class discussions. Class participation will compose 30% of the final grade.

The remainder of your course grade is comprised of several written exercises

1. *Peer review* (10% of the final grade). All students must write a “peer review” of the research design and causal claims in one paper presented this academic year in the PSAC workshop, which students are strongly encouraged to regularly attend. Your review is due by April 28th, but may be completed at any time during the semester. The PSAC schedule is available at: [http://government.arts.cornell.edu/department/related/psac/calendar/](http://government.arts.cornell.edu/department/related/psac/calendar/)

2. *Research design* (40% of the final grade). Complete all five research design assignments described below, and be prepared to discuss these ideas in class. All assignments are due Sundays at 7:00 PM to pepinsky@cornell.edu, on the following dates.

   - Assignment 1: February 5
   - Assignment 2: February 19
   - Assignment 3: March 11
   - Assignment 4: April 1
   - Assignment 5: April 22

3. *Final presentation* (20% of the final grade). Present to the class a 15 minute summary of your research question, theory and observable implications, case selection, and research strategy.

Finally, students are expected to give one another regular feedback on their written work. Before the second assignment is due, the class will be divided into small research support groups. You should read the written assignments of the other members of your group as you receive them and e-mail constructive comments to them. Alternatively, groups can choose to meet weekly to discuss ideas.

Course Policies

*Cheating and Plagiarism*: Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work. Cheating and plagiarism will be treated according to Cornell University regulations, which I will strictly observe. The penalty for violating the Code of Academic Integrity ([http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html](http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html)) is an F for the assignment. Students may consult [http://digitalliteracy.cornell.edu/tutorial/dpl3320.html](http://digitalliteracy.cornell.edu/tutorial/dpl3320.html) for more information, and should visit [http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm](http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm) for a tutorial on plagiarism. For further information on how to cite materials properly, please consult Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (New York: MLA).
**University Policies:** I respect and uphold Cornell University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and or/hearing impaired student; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination.

**Students with Disabilities:** In compliance with the Cornell University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations. Students seeking accommodations should submit to me an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services within the first two weeks of the semester.

- **Religious Observances:** Students may ask for reasonable and timely accommodations for sincerely held religious beliefs. Please review the syllabus closely to determine if your religion will present any scheduling conflicts with any of the assignments. You must inform me of any conflicts within the first two weeks of the semester.
- **Classroom Behavior:** Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students will treat one another with respect and courtesy. I will ask disruptive students to leave the class.

I will not grant incompletes in this class, except as a consequence of extraordinary personal circumstances.

**Texts**

Our readings will come from four books (available for purchase at the Cornell Bookstore) and a series of articles and book chapters (all of which are available as PDF files or external links at the Blackboard course website: [http://blackboard.cornell.edu](http://blackboard.cornell.edu)).

**BOOKS:**


**ALL OTHER READINGS:** All other readings are book chapters and articles, which I have placed on Blackboard (course ID: govt6053-Pepinsky-Spring2012). You can access them all by
clicking the “Readings” tab from our course homepage. You may read these articles and chapters online, or you may print them out. Please read the selections in the order that they are presented below.

Course Schedule

January 25: Introduction


February 1: Puzzles and Questions

- KKV, chapter 1 (pp. 3-33)

February 8: Theories and Models

- Geddes, chapter 5 (pp. 175-211)

February 15: Descriptive Inference

- KKV, chapter 2 (pp. 34-74)
February 22: Concepts and Measurement


February 29: Counterfactuals

- KKV, chapter 3 (pp. 75-114)
- M&W, chapters 1, 2, and 5 (pp. 3-57, 123-166—skim 142-158)

March 7: Case Selection

- KKV, chapters 4-6 (pp. 115-230)
- Geddes, chapter 3 (pp. 89-129)

March 14: Natural and Quasi Experiments
• B&C, chapter 14 (Dunning, pp. 273-311)
• M&W, chapters 4, 7, and 9 (further reading, not required)

Exemplars (Read for Logic and Assumptions)


March 21: Spring Break

March 28: Field, Lab-in-the-Field, and Survey Experiments


Exemplars (Read for Logic and Assumptions)

April 4: Set Theory and Boolean Logic


April 11: Process Tracing and Mechanisms

- B&C, chapter 10 (Bennett, 207-219) and chapter 12 (Brady, 237-242)

April 18: History, Time, and Sequence

- M&W, 244-249

April 25: Students’ Choice

Choose from
- Dissertation Exemplars (recommended)
- Field Work
- Archival Research
- Statistics and Causal Inference
- Anything Else
May 2: Student Presentations